

Funerals

All the variants of the funeral services and memorial prayers are given in the Funeral Service Book compiled by Fr John Winfrey and published by our American Archdiocese. All of our parishes have these already and it is not my intention here today to repeat and illustrate what is in that readily available and excellent book. However, for ease of comparison, I am making a table handout is available showing how the Order of the Funeral Service varies as between a layperson / deacon, (same service), a priest and a bishop - and also the form to be used in the Paschal season.

I shall now describe some of the necessary practices in relation to the services which should be accepted or rejected. Pastoral sensitivity is required in some of these matters and it is, of course, necessary to ensure that the funeral undertakers are fully briefed. Most of my material here is taken from the Guidelines section in the back of the Funeral service book, but it does also refer to other matters.

Sometimes the provisions in the American service book, while Orthodox, need to be qualified. I suspect that cultural factors are at play here and it should be recognised that, perhaps much more so than even in America, the Antiochian Church here in the British Isles and Ireland works not only in a different national context but also with Orthodox in our communities belonging to other traditions and jurisdictions. Here in this Deanery and now Archdiocese we have always tried to be sensitive to the traditions of non-Antiochian Orthodox members of our communities, mainly of course, those of a Slav tradition.

Therefore, subject to the bishop's direction the American ban against an open casket in church would be upsetting to many Orthodox, particularly of a Slav tradition. Again, although in the Antiochian tradition, articles such as crosses, icons, flowers etc. are generally not placed in the coffin before committal, this is normal practice in the Slav tradition. In case of doubt, please consult the bishop.

The remaining guidelines apply to all Orthodox and may be listed as follows: -

No eulogies or other talks by laymen are permitted in the service.

Non-Orthodox music, recorded or otherwise, is not allowed.

Non-Orthodox are not to be buried according to Orthodox funeral rites.

Cremations in the Orthodox Church are not permitted. If the next of kin insist on cremation and there is no Living Will, then the Funeral Service may take place in Church but the committal at the Crematorium must be taken by someone else chosen by the family. The practice of cremation is to be discouraged as far as possible.

All Orthodox should be encouraged to write a Living Will concerning their funeral service, which, although not legally enforceable, is difficult to ignore by non-Orthodox next of kin.

Sunday burials are not allowed.

Memorials may only be performed for Orthodox Christians and this also applies to commemorations in the Proskomedie prayers. Non-Orthodox may be commemorated in the Church's litanies or in personal prayer.

Memorials should ordinarily take place on Saturday, especially Memorial Saturdays.

However, the contemporary practice of offering them after the Sunday Liturgy may receive an episcopal blessing as appropriate.