

Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and Sacraments

Military Funerals in Civilian Parishes

Guidelines

When a soldier dies while in the service of our nation, the choice of where to celebrate the funeral is left to the surviving family members. They may choose to celebrate it in the chapel of the member's current military base, or they may opt to hold the service in a civilian parish. The following resource has been prepared for their respective sectors by the Episcopal Commissions for Liturgy of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), to assist pastors of civilian parishes in the preparation of funerals for military personnel when certain adaptations are requested.¹

A military chaplain is always assigned to the family of the deceased. When the funeral is to be held in a civilian parish, this chaplain will ordinarily contact the pastor of the parish. The parish priest is encouraged at any time to contact the nearest base and arrange to speak to a Catholic chaplain. Moreover, any concerns or requests for assistance can be addressed to the chancellor of the Catholic Military Diocese.²

There are several options for the type of funeral celebrated for military personnel. They range from a full military funeral with very precise and obligatory protocol to a simple memorial service in a public venue or a denominational funeral in a parish setting. The family of the deceased makes the choice. They may decide to omit all military involvement and protocol; however, experience show that most will request military honours and the participation of military chaplains.

The Military Chaplain

The Catholic chaplain in the Canadian Forces, whether a priest, deacon or lay pastoral associate, is a military officer and a member of the Military Diocese of Canada, mandated by the Military Ordinary.

The military chaplain³ assigned to provide pastoral care to the family of a deceased soldier is expected to assist with his or her funeral, whether it is held in a military or in a civilian church or chapel.

The chaplain can be of great assistance to civilian pastors. In most cases they will be known personally by the deceased's family and therefore it is appropriate they be invited to participate in the funeral.

The chaplain is likely the one who has done the notification of next of kin, but even in cases where a reserve chaplain or even the pastor himself has done this, the chaplain's experience with military families can be very helpful.

¹Both National Liturgy Offices of the CCCB have also been involved in compiling a series of texts to assist individuals, parishes and dioceses when there are occasions to offer prayer and spiritual support for those serving in the Canadian Armed Forces and in security and peacekeeping missions. See <http://www.cccb.ca/site/content/view/2418/1226/lang.eng/>.

² Email: sarazin.s@forces.gc.ca, or telephone: 613-998-8747.

³ The military chaplain assigned to the family could be from another religious denomination and can serve as a helpful advisor to all involved.

The Military “Family”

The bond felt among military personnel is a sacred one. The expression “military family” is widely used to refer to this unique bond, not unlike that of the police force or among firefighters.

At the time of death, as they bury one of their own, this bond needs expression. Members of the Armed Forces may be asked to participate as liturgical ministers, as bearers of flags or medals, as lectors, musicians, as members of the honor guard, as spokespersons in Words of Remembrance, or as ushers and servers.

Such exercise of ministries and involvement in the ritual may help alleviate their own grief, as well as that of the family of the deceased.

All military chaplains (Catholic and Protestant) represent both the military chaplaincy and the military establishment. If the fallen soldier and/or his/her family are Catholic, they are under the Military Diocese’s jurisdiction and the Catholic chaplains represent the Military Ordinary. Such funerals are thus occasions for interdiocesan cooperation.

The Funeral Liturgy

- Usually a memorial service will precede or follow a funeral liturgy. Such a memorial service is more of an in-house service, ecumenical or multi-faith in nature and occurring within a military environment –chapel, parade square, or a large public space as circumstances demand. This service gives due honor to a fellow soldier and to grieve his/her loss within the military family (unit, base, regiment, squadron).
- The funeral liturgy may be conducted at the chapel on a Canadian military base and be presided over by one of the military chaplains. It may also be conducted at the soldier’s home parish, and may be presided over by the pastor or the assigned military chaplain.⁴
- The military establishment is prepared to facilitate such a funeral in a civilian parish church and will do everything to assist the local parish priest or minister.
- A military chaplain, usually of the same denomination as the deceased, will be assigned to assist in the planning, preparation and celebration of the service. The chaplain will try to assure that all due military acknowledgements and honours are provided according to established military protocols, and taking into account specific requests of the family but within the parameters of the liturgical requirements and guidelines of the Church.
- Military protocols apply mainly at the moments when the remains of the deceased enter and exit the church and at the cemetery. Great care is taken by all military personnel not to interfere with the established funeral rites of the parish. They will not presume to supplant parish liturgical and music ministers, but will gladly accept invitations to participate in these functions.
- Military personnel in attendance will be dressed in appropriate military uniforms, including a black armband.
- Ordained Catholic military chaplains may be invited to concelebrate, proclaim the Word of God or preach the homily. Catholic military lay pastoral associates, who may be unit chaplains and well known by the deceased member in life, may be invited to share in the various liturgical ministries of the funeral liturgy. Protestant military chaplains may also be invited to participate where appropriate.

⁴ A standard seating plan is already in the military protocol. See appendix: Chapel seating plan, Figure 12-1 from the military ceremonies protocol.

The Words of Remembrance in Military Funerals

CCCB guidelines are clear on the matter of “eulogies”: The Words of Remembrance do not have a proper place in the Funeral Mass because “the funeral liturgy is, as is all liturgy, an act of praise and thanksgiving for Christ’s victory over sin and death, a proclamation of the paschal mystery. This act of worship belongs to the whole community, to the whole Church, and not to any individual or group. Any elements that do not give expression to this act of worship do not have a place.”⁵

However, the *Words of Remembrance* in military memorials and funerals are a well-established tradition.

Some dioceses have tried to find creative ways to accommodate the request for words of remembrance, but to do so in ways that respect the integrity of the Funeral Mass as an act of worship. Whatever accommodation is agreed upon, local diocesan guidelines are to be respected. If *Words of Remembrance* are included, the number, length and content of such testimonies are to be regulated by the presider, according to local custom.

Suggestion: length, 3-5 minutes by one or two persons at most! A written text may be included in the funeral program.

The Canadian Flag

The flag is an important symbol for all of us, but especially for the families of those who die in the service of their country. It is important therefore to show respect for the flag at all times. At the same time, particularly in English-speaking Canada, the funeral pall has become a significant symbol of hope at Catholic funerals. The use of the pall therefore takes precedence over the flag in funeral liturgies.

“When persons who are or were in the military die, family and friends often wish to display the (national) flag as a symbol of national service. They want to drape the flag over the coffin, as is the custom at a ‘military’ funeral. For Catholics, however, baptism remains the fundamental identity. Other emblems should not displace Christian symbols reminding the community of the person's baptism.

“The flag could be put on a standard and placed near the entrance, where it will be visible to all as they enter. If, however, the family do want to have the flag placed on the coffin, it can be done when the coffin is being transported to and from the church

where the main funeral liturgy is to be celebrated. The flag (which should be a suitable size) can then be removed and folded with appropriate ceremony and respect just before the pall is to be placed on the coffin during the welcoming of the body. The flag then becomes part of the ritual action in the liturgy. The pall will be removed after the liturgy, and the flag can again be placed on the coffin as it is being transported out of the church.”⁶

Thus, at the entrance of the church, the flag is respectfully removed with all the dignity and decorum called for by military protocol, and then replaced by the pall, in the same reverential manner. When done well, this dual action can add greatly to the significance of both symbols. The flag may be carried in procession and placed on a special table at the front of the church, in the sanctuary or near the coffin, taking care that it does not obstruct the altar, ambo or chair. Other significant symbols (medals or service headdress) can be placed on the table near the flag.

⁵ *Catholic Funerals and Eulogies, The Pall and the Flag*, edited by the National Liturgy Office, available on CCCB website at <http://www.cccb.ca/site/content/view/2324/1226/lang.eng/>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

At the Gravesite (military protocol)

It is at the gravesite that funeral honours⁷ are particularly in evidence and these can be integrated within the rite of committal.

A) Arrival at the Gravesite (from the Canadian Forces Manual of Drill and Ceremonial):

1. Upon arrival at the gravesite, the guard, band and officiating chaplain take up their positions. The gun carriage/hearse halts and the bearer party removes the casket. The guard present arms (i.e., a formal salute with military weapons). All other military personnel not under command salute.

2. After the casket has been placed on the stretchers over the grave, the guard shall be ordered to rest on their arms reversed or, in certain cases where time does not allow a rehearsal, to shoulder and order arms. The bearer party, on its commander's command, move off by the foot of the grave to the right flank of the guard. The headdress bearers return the headdress to each member of the bearer party. The insignia bearer places the cushion with medals on the casket and joins the chief mourners or military mourners. The chief mourners and honorary pallbearers take up their positions upon arrival, followed by the military and civilian mourners. The rear detachment takes up their position immediately to the rear of the guard. When all the parties have taken up their positions at the gravesite, the officer commanding the funeral parade shall give the order, "Parade, Stand at Ease."

3. The officiating chaplain⁸ then shall step forward to commence the service.

B) The service

1. As the officiating chaplain steps forward, the parade commander will order, "Parade, Remove Headdress." All military personnel, except the guard and band, shall remove headdress.

2. Upon the completion of the service, the officiating chaplain shall step back. This is the signal for the parade commander to order "Parade Replace Headdress", the guard to present arms, and the bugler to sound Last Post, observe a 10-second pause and then sound Reveille. On the sounding of the Last Post, all officers and those personnel not under command shall salute and the salute shall be held until the Reveille is completed.

3. A formal procedure for the removal and folding of the flag by the honour guard will then take place. Afterwards the flag will be presented to the next-of-kin.

4. Following the service those present may pay their respects in accordance with the protocol established by the Canadian Forces Director of Ceremonial, commencing with the officiating clergy.⁹ If volleys (i.e., rifles) are to be fired following the conclusion of the service, the procedure for firing shall be as detailed by the Director of Ceremonial.

⁷ Section 2: *Funerals*: A-AD-200-000/AG-000, Canadian Forces Manual of Drill and Ceremonial, DND publication.

⁸ It can be either the presider at the funeral and/or a military chaplain.

⁹ To the deceased and/or the family.

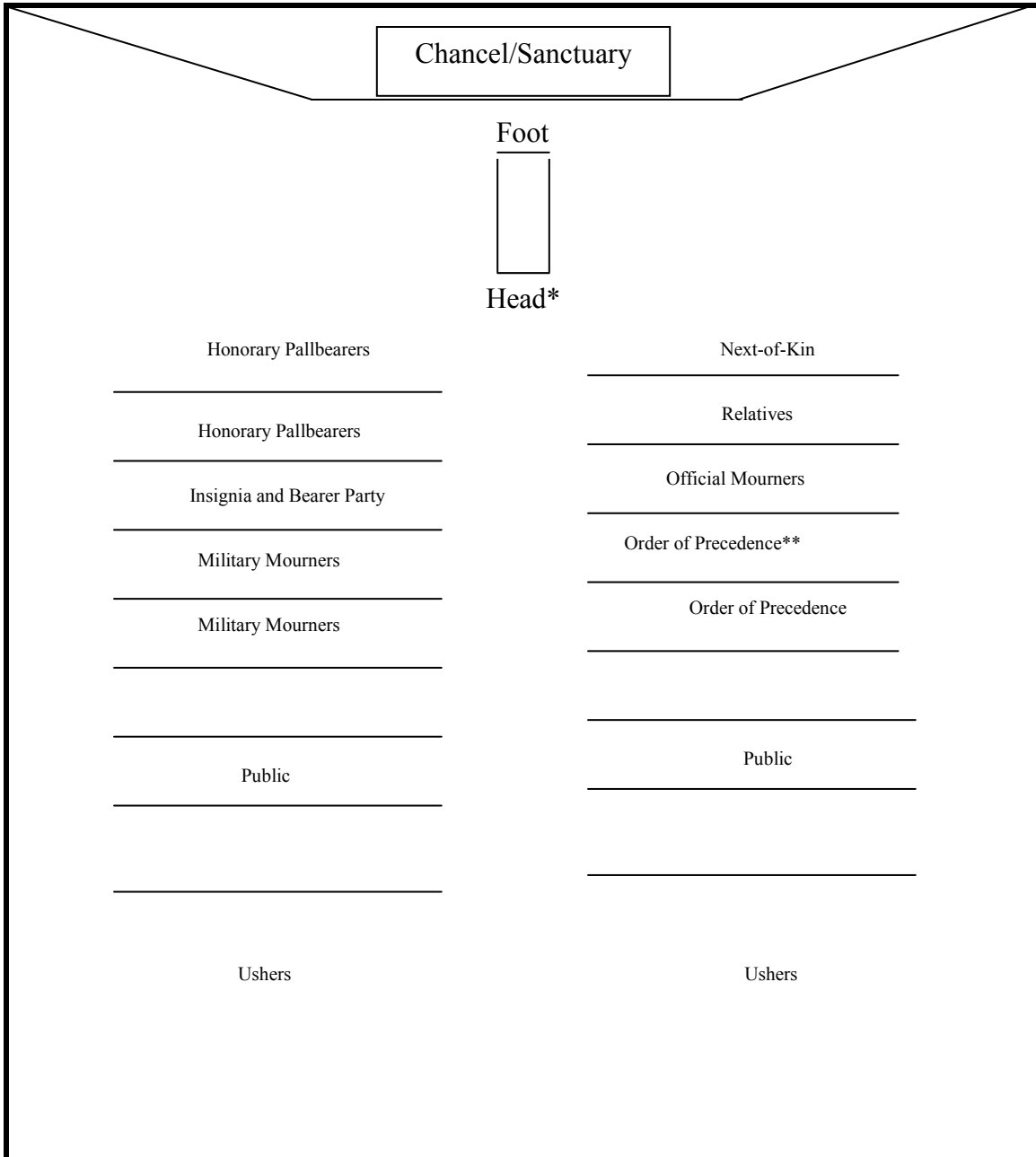
Conclusion

It is our hope that this resource will be a useful aid to those involved in military funerals and memorial services, as we try to minister pastorally to the specific needs of the grief-stricken, while remaining faithful to the great treasury of our liturgical tradition.

“Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in his Church. It is today a distinguishing mark of the Church's life, indeed of the whole tenor of contemporary religious thought and action.” — Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 43

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**Appendix: FIGURE 12 - 1
The Chapel Seating Plan**



* Reversed for funeral of cleric where head is toward chancel/sanctuary.

** The order of precedence for individuals on occasions of state and ceremony in Canada, where state, ecclesiastical, judicial or other high-ranking Canadian authorities are present. The assisting office of the family will be aware of the DND publication *A-AD-200-000/AG-000*.