

Appendix 1: Norms for Words of Remembrance at Funerals in the Diocese of Rochester

The inclusion of Words of Remembrance in the 1989 Order of Christian Funerals is permitted, but not required. These remembrances may occur at the Vigil of the Deceased (OCF #62, 80) or in the Funeral Liturgy (#170).

The provision that “a member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased” (OCF 80, 170, 197) has often led to a confusion between these Words of Remembrance and a eulogy. A eulogy recounts some or all of the significant events in the life of the deceased. Biographical in nature, a eulogy tends to be lengthy. **Words of Remembrance provide briefly some insight into the faith and values of the deceased as seen in one or two examples from his/ her life.**

There are other ways in which the inclusion of Words of Remembrance in the OCF has become problematic:

- The flow and dignity of the liturgy is disrupted by the multiplication of speakers (scheduled or not).
- An inappropriate and embarrassing choice of stories about and characterizations of the deceased are not infrequently made.
- The need of those in the assembly to return to work and other responsibilities, and the schedules of parish staff members, cemetery workers and military honor guards are not respected when the Funeral Liturgy is overly extended by eulogies.

These norms are meant to assist pastoral staffs and funeral directors to develop appropriate and clear practices in guiding those who speak in remembrance of the dead.

1. The most appropriate time for Words of Remembrance is **at the Vigil for the Deceased** when family, friends and colleagues gather to remember the deceased, both formally and informally, and to console one another. In this setting, more than one remembrance may be made, and a eulogy may even be given. Pastoral ministers should strongly encourage this understanding.
2. **One person only speaks in the name of all** when the Words of Remembrance occur at the Funeral Mass or Funeral Liturgy outside Mass.
3. These Words of Remembrance should be brief: **no more than 3-4 minutes** (one typed page). The representative speaker should be reminded that these words are within the good flow and dignity of the liturgy, and need to take into consideration the schedules of those who are part of this event.
4. The Words of Remembrance **should be prepared beforehand**, and ideally reviewed with the priest or the presiding minister beforehand, to avoid undue length or embarrassing situations.
5. Words of Remembrance may also occur during the Rite of Committal at the graveside or mausoleum, or at other social gatherings associated with the funeral.
6. The proper time for the representative to speak in remembrance of the deceased is:
 - Vigil service: after the Concluding Prayer, before the Blessing and Dismissal
 - Funeral Mass: after the Prayer After Communion, before the Final Commendation
 - Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass: after the Lord’s Prayer, before the Final Commendation
 - Committal Service: after the Prayer of Committal, before the Intercessions

Parish Guidelines for Preparing Words of Remembrance

Thank you for accepting the responsibility of speaking Words of Remembrance on behalf of the family and friends of the deceased. Here are some points to guide you in the preparation of what you will say. We ask you to read them and observe them carefully.

1. **You have been asked to offer “words of remembrance,” not a eulogy.** A eulogy tends to tell the story of a person’s whole life and accomplishments, and can get very lengthy. Words of Remembrance provide briefly some insight into the faith and values of the deceased as seen in one or two representative example from his/her life. The words of remembrance then become words of encouragement and comfort to those who are present.

2. Since they occur within the Church’s acts of prayer for the deceased and the survivors, the Words of Remembrance should be **no more than 3-4 minutes (a single type-written page)**. Keeping your remarks brief and to-the-point recognizes not only the flow of the liturgy, but also the fact that people have often made a sacrifice to be present. Brevity is the kindest and most appreciated consideration you can give them.

3. There may be some in the congregation who did not know the deceased, but have come in support of the family. Therefore, **“inside” stories about the deceased may not be understood**. Save such remembrances for the more intimate moments with the family, especially during the painful days and weeks after the funeral. The time for the words of remembrance is not a time for lengthy storytelling. A touch of humor may be helpful if done with respect and sensitivity.

4. Before you begin to compose the words of remembrance **ask help from God**, that you will be enabled to speak in a way worthy of the occasion. Ask suggestions from friends and family.

5. **Write out your remarks in full.** Writing out the complete text will insure that you stay within the time limitation. The presiding priest, deacon or other pastoral minister may be available to preview your remarks and make helpful suggestions. Rely on their judgment and experience.

6. **Rehearse your words of remembrance before a friend or family member.** If there are deep emotions that need to be dealt with, rehearsal is the time to express them. While a public display of emotion is understandable and sometimes laudable, copious tears and uncontrollable sobbing before the congregation will not be helpful.

7. Before the service begins, ask a parish staff to show you exactly **where you are to speak**. Go there and get “the feel” of the place. Please practice with the staff to ensure that you properly heard even those seated at the back of the church.

8. The priest, deacon or pastoral minister will introduce you at the proper time in the service, so that you will know exactly when you are to come forward. **Approach the podium or lectern with great confidence.** To begin with expressions like “I’m not used to this sort of thing” or “I hope I can get through this” defeats you before you ever begin. If you find yourself tensing up or getting dry, breathe deeply. A good supply of oxygen will get you back on track.