



ST PAUL'S

ST CLARE'S

Bulletin Highlights

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time ~ Year A

1st October 2017

Conducting Funerals Compassionately

The matter of eulogies over the past two weeks has certainly generated plenty of interest and comment. You would already have noticed that the results of last week's survey have been included as an insert within this week's PCN. Thanks to all who participated. For parishioners who may not be aware, the following process applies when there is a request for a funeral in the parish church:

The Funeral Director (FD) acts on behalf of the family of the deceased and contacts the parish office or Father Michael, or Father Joe. Requests for visiting priests require the permission of Father Michael.

By this time, the family would be aware that funerals in the church are sacred and that secular music is not permitted.

In collaboration with the family, the FD and the priest determine a mutually agreeable time for the funeral. Contact details and basic information are passed on from the FD to the priest who will soon after contact the family. A meeting time is organised in the presbytery.

The meeting between the family and the priest is usually about an hour, but sometime longer. Generally, the priest tries to understand a little about the life of the deceased, as well as other family details according to circumstances. He will be able to discern, even if only minimally, the impact of the death upon other family members. In the case of a family member who had reached a venerable old age and suffered considerably, the family invariably feel a mixture of loss and relief. In the unexpected death of a younger person, the family are almost certainly traumatised, an experience that will remain for at least a few years.

It is from this time together that the priest will then be able to prepare his homily. This may be relatively easy in some circumstances, but much more demanding and time-consuming in really tragic deaths such as motor vehicle fatalities. Words need to be chosen very carefully. It would not be unusual for a priest to dedicate at least a few hours to the preparation of a 12 minute homily. Spiritual content is important. Paternalistic and sanctimonious statements are very counter-productive.

During this meeting, the funeral ceremony is also discussed in detail including choice of readings, intercessions, sacred music, a visual tribute and so on. Advice and guidance about eulogies are often disregarded.

On behalf of the family, the priest will organise the musician and vocalist. This ensures that there will be order and beauty to the ceremony. For the benefit of the family, the priest will also advise on how to prepare a booklet which may vary in length from four pages to eight or possibly even twelve. Once again, this is undertaken in detail, and the family is then provided with a template which is emailed by the priest soon after the meeting.

In the case of a Requiem Mass, the priest is normally present in church at least 45 minutes before the scheduled starting time to set up for Mass, receive the funeral directors and then greet those who will be attending. The duration of Mass is

generally under an hour but the total time of the funeral can be way over 90 minutes depending upon the number of eulogies. In extreme cases, a funeral can take longer than two hours.

When the coffin is brought to the hearse, there is a transition time of about 20 minutes before continuing on to the cemetery which, if Forest Lawn Leppington, is about a 20-25 minute drive. The time at the graveside or, in the case of a cremation, in the chapel is about 25 minutes.

The point is, is that on behalf of the church, the priest accompanies and supports the grieving family in many different ways before and during the funeral and, sometimes, afterwards as well. indeed, before the death, he may have administered the sacraments to the dying person in hospital, at home or in palliative care. Most families are very grateful, but not all.

The matter of eulogies has been discussed by the parish pastoral council and will continue to come under discernment. Thanks for your interest.



Bishop's Annual Appeal ~ With Gratitude in Anticipation

In response to the growing number of sick and retired clergy, the Bishop's Annual Appeal has become increasingly necessary to meet continuously rising costs. There are now many priests in the diocese who are over 70 and, who within five years, will require accommodation. Resettlement costs are so often quite substantial – requiring, for example, the purchase of furniture – and demand a sizable investment of capital. The Bishop has ultimate responsibility for the support and care of retired priests and, therefore, relies upon the generosity of the wider Catholic community to assist him through financial support. Last year's appeal was very encouraging and a tribute to all who were so supportive.

For this year's appeal, envelopes have been set out in the pews. You may wish to simply insert a cash contribution. Alternatively, you may wish to make a contribution in some other form. If you provide all your contact details, then you will invariably become part of a data base and be contacted at other times for other reasons. So please be reflective about the way in which you may decide to assist. At Masses this weekend, a short video will replace the homily. It's a comparatively brief video with a little local flavour.