



Archdiocese of Newark
Order of Christian Funerals
Policy on *Words of Remembrance*
Effective March 1, 2021

Introduction

1. *The Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)* states that: “A member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation begins.” See *OCF*, 96, 170, 197, 309, 382, 394.
2. Since 2003, the Archdiocese of Newark has had a policy on *Words of Remembrance* inconsistent with the *OCF*. Through the years the policy has proven to be problematic and has not been implemented consistently in the parishes.
3. Consequently, various practices regarding the time when such a remembrance would take place: before Mass begins, before the opening prayer, after communion, after the liturgy. As a result, practices emerged that were inconsistent with liturgy of the Church.
4. After consulting the Council of Priests and the College of Deans, Cardinal Tobin now promulgates the following policy regarding *Words of Remembrance*, replacing the previous policy that was enacted in 2003.

Who May Speak?

5. “A member or a friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased.” (*OCF*, 170) By this formulation, the *OCF* indicates that there is to be only one speaker. While there is no indication that the individual must be Catholic or even Christian, the speaker should be respectful of the setting and capable of speaking clearly in a composed manner.
6. It should be noted that *Words of Remembrance* are optional; however, the opportunity for a person to speak should not be denied when requested.

What May Be Said?

7. The *OCF*, 27, says that the homily “is never to be a eulogy.” This principle should be applied to a correct understanding of the *Words of Remembrance* as well. A eulogy is a speech to praise the deceased. *Words of Remembrance* are to be

understood as a reflection on the life of the deceased in the light of faith. Using the proper terminology when speaking with the faithful is important in communicating a correct understanding of this element in the funeral rites.

8. *Words of Remembrance* should be composed prior to the liturgy and reviewed by the celebrant or pastoral minister in advance. Inappropriate expressions, coarse humor, crude language, or actions not in keeping with the sacredness of the place and liturgy as well as the dignity of the deceased are never permitted. The length of the *Words of Remembrance* should be in proportion to the rest of the liturgy (e.g., the homily and especially, the Eucharistic Prayer) and therefore should not exceed 3-4 minutes.

When to Speak?

9. At the Vigil Service and at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, the *Words of Remembrance* occur after the Lord's Prayer and collect (*OCF*, 80).
10. During the Funeral Mass, the *Words of Remembrance* occur following the prayer after communion (*OCF*, 170).
11. During the Funeral Liturgy Outside Mass, the *Words of Remembrance* occur after the Lord's Prayer or the prayer after communion. See *OCF*, 197.
12. An open sharing of memories could take place before or after the Vigil Service, after the Committal Service or at the repast.

Where to Speak?

13. According to the *OCF*, 170, following the prayer after communion, the celebrant and ministers move to the casket before the *Words of Remembrance*. (However, according to circumstances, the celebrant may remain at the chair for the *Words of Remembrance*).
14. The *Words of Remembrance* should be spoken from a place other than the ambo, which ordinarily is reserved for the word of God. It seems appropriate that they be delivered from a place near the casket.
15. Guidelines for *Words of Remembrance* should be given to the speaker beforehand by parish bereavement minister or funeral director.
16. Any practices to the contrary should be discontinued.
17. Any exception to this policy must be approved by the Regional Bishop on a case-by-case basis.