

Media coverage of funerals

Determine the degree of coverage to allot to reporters

A. No coverage – The family and/or pastor or parish director may prefer not to accommodate reporters who are trying to cover a person’s funeral. Such a decision means reporters and their equipment are not allowed on church property or inside the church. In this case, it is best to notify various news organizations ahead of time rather than when they arrive at the church. The diocese’s Department of Communications can facilitate these arrangements, if the family or parish leader would like. Regardless of the family’s decision, please know that the media still have the right to be on public property, which includes sidewalks. If the family requests no media presence, please ask reporters to set up their equipment down the block or across the street so that the family can have some privacy to grieve. Most reporters will be sensitive to the family’s request and will comply.

B. Limited or full coverage – The family and/or pastor or parish director may be willing to accommodate reporters and their equipment to some degree. If so, please consider the following:

1. Where do you want reporters and cameras to be? At the visitation, the funeral or the cemetery? Consider restricting them and their equipment to the back of the church or the choir loft, if there is one. Either location avoids the possibility of having media members walking up and down the aisle and distracting people from the liturgy. Many reporters are not Catholic, so it is important to explain to them the sacredness of the liturgy and the importance of limiting distracting behavior.
2. When should reporters/photographers set up their equipment? Most news agencies are willing to set up early so they draw minimal attention to themselves.
3. If reporters and their equipment are allowed to set up at the visitation and/or funeral then allow them to stay for the entire event. Giving them the boot halfway through a liturgy creates a huge disruption for worshippers and frustrates the reporters.
4. Where do you want microphones? Often, reporters will want to place their microphones or recorders on the ambo or somewhere in the front of the church so they can record the priest’s homily or the family’s reflection. In most cases, families choose to not allow microphones anywhere other than in the back of the church. As an alternative, can the media plug into your sound system?
5. Does the family want a spokesperson to speak to reporters on their behalf? This is a personal decision. If the family chooses to, it is usually best to limit the spokesperson availability to reporters to 15 minutes prior to Mass rather than after.
6. Prior to the liturgy, consider announcing to the congregants that the media are present with the family’s permission. A short, simple announcement can circumvent any unfortunate run-ins.

C. Above all else – Treat all the reporters the same. Giving preferential treatment to one creates animosity among the others; plus, it reflects poorly on the diocese and the Catholic Church.