

Funeral guidelines must be observed to avoid further lives being put at risk – Bishop Leahy



Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy has said while we must preserve our great culture of compassion towards the bereaved, we must stay away from funerals or further lives will be put at risk.

Outlining a five-point plan in freshly stated guidelines for the public from the Bishops of the Cashel Province, for funerals, Bishop Leahy said that we have a proud culture of physically and metaphorically standing by those experiencing grief but, save for immediate family members as prescribed by public guidelines, that cannot now happen.

Bishop Leahy said that in offering these five points, it must be recognised that the vast majority of Catholics have been careful in their observance of the public health guidelines.

“We are at a very sensitive stage. The pandemic is wreaking a dreadful toll on society. We are seeing more people die from COVID now than we did at any stage over the last 12 months. Our hospitals are at breaking point and while the number of cases is finally dropping, the UK variant is widespread and much more virulent than what has gone before.

“That’s why we are restating our own guidelines around funerals. We do so for the benefit of all concerned – mourners, undertakers, neighbours and friends as well as priests and public authorities – that we might have a common understanding of good practice around funerals aimed at keeping people safe from the virus.

“We wish to express our thanks to priests and sacristans as well as the many volunteers in our churches who ensure that all the requirements around the sanitising of our churches are observed. We also acknowledge with gratitude the care and help of undertakers in implementing the restrictions. May our deceased loved ones rest in peace and may the bereaved be comforted.”

26th January 2021

THE FIVE POINTS ARE:

- 1. Public Health guidelines are clear: attendance at funerals is to be restricted to 10. We appreciate there are some who believe that for the sake of accommodating the immediate family it would be better to allow a number higher than 10 for the funeral liturgy in a church. We too look forward to when that number can be increased. However, it is important that undertakers and priests clarify with bereaved families as early as possible regarding the limit of 10 people in the church.**

- 2. As recommended in our statement last March, there should be no removal to the church the evening before.**

- 3. People not attending the funeral liturgy should avoid congregating immediately outside the church building or around the hearse. For the sake of the great majority trying to keep to the public health guidelines, we ask people, difficult as it is, not to approach the bereaved in the church grounds or cemetery to sympathise.**

- 4. As per the public health guidelines regarding social and family gatherings, there should be no wakes or large gatherings for prayers in the house of the deceased nor gatherings in cemeteries.**

- 5. Support for the bereaved can be expressed through social media as an alternative to attending the funeral. Often it is possible to link to a local church for a funeral ceremony via a webcam/Facebook Live. We invite people to pray for the deceased and family of the deceased in their own homes at the time of the funeral Mass.**

The Bishops of the Cashel Province are Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly; Bishop William Crean; Bishop Brendan Leahy; Bishop Ray Browne; Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan; Bishop Fintan Monahan; Bishop Fintan Gavin.

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