

# **THE SERVICE OF PRAYER AND NAMING AND THE FUNERAL SERVICE IN CASES OF MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTH AND NEONATAL DEATH**

## **Pastoral and Liturgical Guidelines for Clergy**

The Church is conscious of the need for particular pastoral care for the parents and families of children dying near the time of birth. The services and prayers provided here are an important part of that pastoral care. It is important that the Church acknowledges the fact that the parents are grieving the loss of a human life that is experienced at a very deep level. In situations where parents receive an antenatal diagnosis that their baby has a life-limiting condition and may not survive pregnancy, a service of blessing and/or naming can be an important part of honouring the ongoing life of their baby and an important pastoral comfort and support as parents prepare for the possible death of their baby. These services therefore provide for prayer and naming of a child who has died or is expected to die in utero or during or shortly after birth. The provision of a special funeral service is also designed to meet the particular pastoral needs of parents, to acknowledge their grief, pain and confusion, and to assure them of God's unfailing love for their child and for them.

In the event of an unanticipated stillbirth parents have no time to prepare and experience sudden acute bereavement. Particular pastoral sensitivity is required when parent/s have experienced trauma or where a pregnancy has necessitated termination. The clergy/chaplains' and/or lay pastoral workers' liturgical provision needs to be as sensitive and competent as their pastoral response.

Practical arrangements for these services should take into account that a grieving mother may have recently given birth and may be physically uncomfortable. Consideration should be given to the provision of comfortable seating, the temperature of venues and the duration of services.

Siblings should be included in these services both at the planning stage and during them. Children can be encouraged to create tokens of remembrance such as a written or spoken prayer, art, letters, symbols etc. which can then be appropriately presented and/or woven into the prayers.

Parents/families and their baby who has died should be included in services of remembrance in the parish with the permission of the parents.

Once preparations for these services have been finalised, a service sheet should be provided with the baby's, parent/s' (and siblings') names on it.

## **The Service of Prayer and Naming**

Some parents might appreciate a service of prayer and naming (usually privately) while their baby is still alive in utero. When parents give their baby a name the Church's provision of a naming ceremony is an important pastoral response. The Service of Prayer can be used on its own or in conjunction with the Naming service. This can also be a time to prepare for the funeral of a baby and to explore personal choices.

The Service of Prayer and Naming provided here should be used separately but in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to use it just before the Funeral Service. Some parents may prefer this to be done in the hospital and others may prefer it to take place privately at home. Others may prefer that this service takes place in a church privately, or with close family members, or with family, friends and parishioners present.

The Naming should include an appropriate certificate of naming to be given to the parents. In the case of miscarriage with the resulting absence of legal registration, this takes on a particular significance for parents as it may be the only document with their baby's name on it.

## **The Funeral Service**

The use of the baby's name is essential throughout the funeral service.

Whilst positive language is very important in supporting parents and in conveying the message of Christian hope, clergy should not avoid the expression of the depth of emotion and pain being felt by all involved.

The Funeral Service should at the same time honour the life of the baby, the pain of loss, the loss of hopes and dreams and the hope of the baby now being in God's love/care.

Some passages of scripture are provided and any alternative choices should be chosen sensitively. Readings that communicate any sense of guilt, shame or blame must be avoided.

The use of symbol, gesture and music is important and should be chosen in consultation with the parents. Clergy should be generous and flexible in this regard.

Prayers of intercession are provided in the service and additional resources are included in the Additional Liturgical and Pastoral Resources section.

Other carefully chosen material is included in this section to allow some tailoring of the services to particular situations and to support those offering pastoral care.