

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. These services therefore provide for the blessing and naming of a child who has died 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. The clergy/chaplains' and/or lay pastoral workers' liturgical involvement 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 Blessing 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 separately 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 either 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 (all too short) 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.

A SERVICE OF PRAYER AND NAMING

IN THE CONTEXT OF EXPECTED OR ACTUAL MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTH OR NEONATAL DEATH

SENTENCE OF SCRIPTURE

This or another suitable sentence of Scripture is read.

‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you.’

(Jeremiah 1:5)

OPENING PRAYER

The minister says

God of compassion, we are gathered here with ... *(and ...)*,
to honour this baby not able to be brought to the fullness of life
we hoped and intended for *him/her*.

We seek the comfort and knowledge of your love
as given to us in Holy Scripture,
in the gift of your child Jesus who dwelt and died among us,
and in your presence with us, as we bless [and name] *him/her*,
and commend *him/her* to your care.

Let us remind ourselves of your knowledge of this baby in the words of Psalm 139:
You yourself created my inmost parts You knit me together in my mother’s womb My
body was not hidden from you While I was being made in secret and woven in the
depth of the earth Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb: all of them
were written in your book; they were fashioned day by day when as yet there were none
of them. *Psalm 139: 12, 14-15*

THE READING

Luke 18: 15–17

People were bringing even infants to Jesus that he might touch them; and when the
disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and
said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these
that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the
kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’

The Naming

If the baby is not being named, the service continues with The Prayers.

The minister says

Holy scripture teaches us that what is called into being, we know and remember through naming. In recognition of the place this baby holds in our family and in our hearts, in honour of the brief time *he/she* was embodied with us, we now name *him/her* We do this also that we might give voice to our longing for *him/her*, [our grief at *his/her* loss] and our prayers to you on *his/her* behalf.

The minister addresses the parents:

... (and ...) have you chosen a name for your baby?

The parents answer:

I/we name him/her ...

The minister says

..., we give you this name,
and do so in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The minister may make the sign of the cross and continues

Although your life is brief,
you will be remembered as one belonging to the ... family
and as a gift shared with us all.

THE PRAYERS

The minister says

Let us pray.

Either of the following prayers may be said by the minister or family members.

God of wisdom and all compassion,
you love all that you have created.

In the midst of our many questions and our lack of understanding
we believe that little *name* is in your presence.

We pray for the courage and strength to say “good-bye”
before we had the opportunity to say “hello.”

May you, O Lord, care for, love and nurture little *name* forever.

Help us to endure and wait for the day when we will be re-united
after we too obtain the fullness of your promises in the age to come,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

or

O God, creator of us all,
give us the grace to honour and remember our baby N.
Let our love for *him/her* show forth in our lives.
Sustain our trust in your unfailing love
for *him/her* and for all children, born and unborn,
who rest in the sacred mystery of your love.
May we know your comforting presence
as we gather our strength to go forth from this moment into our lives.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Where the Naming has not taken place and the baby has died the minister may say
Almighty God,
we leave in your gracious keeping this infant, baby of ... (*and ...*).
We call to mind the love Jesus bestowed on the children brought before him,
and pray that *he/she is now*, and has ever been,
held in the compassionate embrace of your eternal love. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

The minister says

Joining our cares into one prayer, let us pray as our Saviour taught us:
Our Father ...

The Dismissal

The minister may say

Tender Shepherd of the flock, ... lies cradled in your love.
Soothe the hearts of *his/her* mother (*and father*),
and bring peace to their lives.
Strengthen their faith and give hope to their hearts.
We ask this in your name. **Amen.**

or in the cases where the baby has died

Heavenly Father, ... and ... have named their baby ... ,
a name to be treasured for ever in their hearts.
But it was you who formed *him/her* in the womb;
you knew *him/her* by name before time began.
Now we commit ... into your ever-caring and gentle love.
He/she brought the promise of joy
to many lives for so short a time.
Enfold *him/her* now in eternal life,
in the name of our risen Saviour who was born and died
and lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit for ever. **Amen.**

The minister says

The eternal God is your dwelling place,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.
May God bless us and keep us.
May God's countenance shine upon us,
and grant us peace and love. **Amen.**

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

For use with or by parents.

God of hope,
we come to you in shock and grief and confusion of heart.
Help us to find peace
in the knowledge of your loving mercy to all your children,
and give us light to guide us out of our darkness
into the assurance of your love. **Amen.**

For use with parents where the baby has died.

Gracious God,
we thank you for the love in which ... was conceived
and for the love of the home into which *he/she* was to be born.
We pray that the love which *his/her* parents have for each other
may grow and deepen as a result of this experience.
Give us grace, in patience and understanding,
to listen to each other,
and to help one another in the days to come. **Amen.**

FUNERAL SERVICE IN THE EVENT OF A MISCARRIAGE OR STILLBIRTH

Gathering in God's Name

SENTENCES OF SCRIPTURE

God is our refuge and strength:
a very present help in trouble. *Psalms 46: 1*

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. *Lamentations 3: 22-23*

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. *Matthew 5: 4*

No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
nor has the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him. *1 Corinthians 2: 9*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. *1 Peter 1: 3*

GREETING

The minister says

May the peace and consolation of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.

These or other suitable words of introduction may be used.

We have gathered here today to commend a beloved child, *name ...* to our heavenly Father, to assure the parent(s) ... (and ...) of God's everlasting love, to acknowledge the deep sorrow in this loss, and to offer comfort and support.

Heavenly Father,
your Son took little children into his arms and blessed them.
Grant to us now the assurance that baby ...
is encircled by those arms of love.
In the midst of our grief,
strengthen by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
our faith and hope in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

or

For those who trust in God,
in the pain of sorrow there is consolation
in the face of despair there is hope,
in the midst of death there is life.
... [*and ...*] as we mourn the death of ...
we place ourselves in the hands of God
and ask for strength, for healing and for love. **Amen.**

Proclaiming and Receiving the Word

THE FIRST READING

Jeremiah 31: 15-17

Thus says the Lord:
A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.
Thus says the Lord:
Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears;
for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord:
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;
there is hope for your future, says the Lord:
your children shall come back to their own country.

or

Revelation 21: 1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'

or

1 John 3: 1-2

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

A PSALM

This or another suitable Psalm is used.

Psalm 139 – adapted.

O Lord, you have searched us out and known us.
You know when we sit down and when we rise up;
you discern our thoughts from far away.
You search out our paths and our lying down,
and are acquainted with all our ways.
Even before a word is on our tongues, O Lord,
you know it completely.
You hem us in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon us.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for us.
Search us out O Lord, and lay your hand upon us.

Where can we go from your spirit?
Or where can we flee from your presence?
If we ascend to heaven, you are there;
if we make our beds in the depths, you are there.
If we take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead us.
Search us out O Lord, and lay your hand upon us.

If we say, "Surely the darkness shall cover us,
and the light around us become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.
Search us out O Lord, and lay your hand upon us.

For it was you who formed our inward parts;
you knit us together in our mothers' wombs.
We praise you, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that we know very well.
Search us out O Lord, and lay your hand upon us.

Mark 10: 13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

or

John 14: 1-3

Jesus said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.'

SERMON/REFLECTION

and/or

SYMBOLIC ACTS, AND/OR REFLECTION FROM PARENTS/FAMILY/FRIENDS

THE PRAYERS

May be said by the parents, other family members, or the minister.

The minister, a family member other than the parent(s), or a friend of the family say the last petition.

O God, we offer our thanks for ...,
for the potential of *his/her* life
which came to us as a precious gift from you,
even though that potential was not realised
as we would have wished.
Although we come with sorrow and with tears,
we trust in your unfailing love.
Lord, in your mercy.
Hear our prayer.

We thank you that the Scriptures proclaim
that nothing can separate us from your love.
We acknowledge that even though ...
has been part of our lives for a short time,
he/she has left a mark that will never be lost.
Lord, in your mercy.
Hear our prayer.

We thank you too for the promise
that what we see here in this world is not all there is,
and for the hope of seeing *him/her* again
because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Increase our capacity to trust in your grace, even through our loss.
Despite the emptiness that we now feel,
we know that ... is safe in your arms of love.
Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

The minister, a family member other than the parent(s), or a friend of the family say(s)

O God, help and comfort the parent(s) of ...
and all who grieve today.

We thank you for the people
who hold and support them
and ask that you continue to show
your grace to this family.

May your peace, courage, hope and light
draw us all together in this hour;
this we pray in the name of Jesus,
who died, and yet lives forever. **Amen.**

The Farewell in Christ

The minister says

All loving and caring God, parent of us all,
you know our grief in our loss,
for you too suffered the death of your child.
Give us strength to go forward from this day,
trusting, where we do not understand, that your love never ends.
When all else fails, you still are God.

We thank you for the life and hope that you give
through the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ.

We pray to you for one another in our need,
and for all, anywhere, who mourn with us this day.

To those who doubt, give light;
to those who are weak, strength;
to all who sorrow, your peace;
and to you, with your Church on earth and in heaven,
we offer honour and praise, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The minister (and others if desired) stand before the coffin or urn and lay hands on it saying
Receive ... into the arms of your mercy.
Receive us also, and raise us to new life.
Help us so to love and serve you in this world
that we may enter into your joy in the world to come. **Amen.**

or where the body is not present.

Lord, faithful creator and most loving redeemer,
whose Son took little children in his arms and blessed them:
we now leave your child ... in your gracious keeping.
We believe *he/she* is yours in death as in life.
Comfort, we pray, all who have loved *him/her* on earth,
and bring us all to your everlasting kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Committal

SENTENCES OF SCRIPTURE

Any or all the following sentences of Scripture may be read.

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. *John 11: 25, 26*

For I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth; then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold and not another. *Job 19: 25, 27*

For we brought nothing into the world so that we can take nothing out of it.
1 Timothy 6: 7

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. *Job 1:21*

When the coffin or urn has been lowered into the grave, the minister says

In as much as Almighty God,
in his wise providence,
has received from this world baby ... ,
we therefore commit *this mortal body/these ashes* to the ground,
looking for the resurrection in the last day
and the life of the world to come,
through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The minister continues

Father in heaven,
raise us from the death of sin
to the life of righteousness,
that when we shall depart this life
we may rest in Christ.

We pray that at the resurrection on the last day
we may be found acceptable in your sight
and receive that blessing which your beloved Son
shall then pronounce to all who love and fear you, saying,
“Come, you blessed of my Father,
receive the kingdom prepared for you
from the beginning of the world.”
Grant this, O merciful Father,
through Jesus Christ, our redeemer. **Amen.**

or

Lord, faithful creator and most loving redeemer,
whose Son took little children in his arms and blessed them:
we now leave your child ... in your gracious keeping.
We believe *he/she* is yours in death as in life.
Comfort, we pray, all who have loved *him/her* on earth,
and bring us all to your everlasting kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

God of love, we thank you
for all with which you have blessed us,
for the gift of joy in days of health and strength
and for the gifts of your abiding presence and promise
in days of pain and grief.
We praise you for home and friends,
and for our baptism and place in your Church
with all who have faithfully lived and died.
Above all else we thank you for your Son
our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who knows our grief,
who died our death and rose for our sake,
and who lives and prays for us.

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

or

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say

**Our Father, who art in heaven:
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

**And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.**

THE DISMISSAL

Loving God,
be with us as we face the mystery of life and death.
Strengthen the bonds of this family as they bear their loss.
Help them to go from here
with courage and confidence in your care and love;
through our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

A priest says

May Christ the Good Shepherd enfold you with love,
fill you with peace, and lead you in hope,
this day and all your days.

Amen.

If no priest is present the following is used.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

Additional Liturgical and Pastoral Resources

ALTERNATIVE INTRODUCTION TO THE FUNERAL SERVICE

The minister says

We meet in God's loving presence
to acknowledge our loss of one so young.
God knows and loves this child
*[whose parent(s), ... and ...,
have given her/him the name ...].*
We ask for God's grace
that in our pain we may find comfort;
in our sorrow, hope;
in our questioning, understanding;
and in the experience of death, resurrection.

or

We have come together to worship God,
to thank him for his love,
and to remember the [short] life on earth of;
to share our grief and to leave *him/her* to the eternal care of God.
[We meet in the faith that death is not the end,
and may be faced without fear, bitterness or guilt.]

God of all mercies,
you make nothing in vain
and love all that you have made.
Comfort us in our grief,
and console us by the knowledge of your unfailing love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Where a child has lived briefly after birth:

Isaiah 65: 17-25

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord - and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

On the theme of grief and hope:

Lamentations 3: 19-26, 31-33

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'
The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
For the Lord will not reject for ever.
Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

PRAYERS

This prayer may be used within the funeral service or in hospital or at home.

Lord, we do not understand why this life,
which we had hoped to bring into this world,
is now gone from us.
We only know that where there was sweet expectation,
now there is bitter disappointment;
where there was hope and excitement,
there is a sense of failure.
We have seen how fragile life is,
and nothing can replace this life, this child,
whom we have loved before seeing,
before feeling *him/her* stirring in the womb,
even before *he/she* was conceived.
In our pain and confusion, we look to you, Lord,
in whom no life is without meaning, however small or brief.
Let not our limited understanding confine our faith.
Draw us closer to you and to one another.
Lay our broken hearts open in faith to you
and in ever greater compassion to one another.
So raise us from death to life,
we pray in Christ's name. **Amen.**

For use in the Funeral Service

The Lord Jesus is the lover of his people and our only sure hope.
Let us ask him to deepen our faith and sustain us in this dark hour.

You became a little child for our sake,
sharing our human life.

To you we pray:

bless us and keep us, O Lord.

You grew in wisdom, age and grace
and learned obedience through suffering.

To you we pray:

bless us and keep us, O Lord.

You welcomed children, promising them your kingdom.

To you we pray:

bless us and keep us, O Lord.

You comforted those who mourned the loss of children and friends.

To you we pray:

bless us and keep us, O Lord.

You took upon yourself the suffering and death of us all.

To you we pray:

bless us and keep us, O Lord.

You promised to raise up those who believe in you,
just as you were raised up in glory by the Father.

To you we pray:

bless us and keep us, O Lord.

PASTORAL PRAYERS

For use with or by parents.

God of hope,
we come to you in shock and grief and confusion of heart.
Help us to find peace
in the knowledge of your loving mercy to all your children,
and give us light to guide us out of our darkness
into the assurance of your love. **Amen.**

For use with parents.

Gracious God,
we thank you for the love in which ... was conceived
and for the love of the home into which *he/she* was to be born.
We pray that the love which *his/her* parents have for each other
may grow and deepen as a result of this experience.
Give us grace, in patience and understanding,
to listen to each other,
and to help one another in the days to come.

Loving Father, you are our refuge and strength,
our hope and constant care.
Comfort these parents
with the knowledge that the child for whom they grieve
is now entrusted to your loving embrace.
Wipe every tear from their eyes
and mend their broken hearts
that, yearning for life,
they may find fulfillment in Jesus your Son
whose rising from the dead
restores our lives to you,
and leads us to the life of heaven.
Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**