

A Mass or Liturgy to Celebrate the Life of a School Child

The Directory for Masses with Children encourages full and active participation of children in the preparation for and celebration of the liturgy e.g.

- Setting up the sacred space
- Preparing the altar

Involvement in preparation and choice of symbols can assist in the grieving process, especially when it occurs in the safe context of the classroom or peer group with the teacher or helper.

- Acting as cantor
- Singing
- Playing musical instrument
- Responding during the homily
- Prayers of faithful
- Bringing in the gifts

Again, active participation in the liturgy of a memorial mass or funeral rite can be cathartic and helpful in assisting young people to grieve and integrate the loss and memory of the person into their current and future lives.

Try to create as many opportunities for involvement as possible.

INTRODUCTORY RITE

■ **Entrance: hymn and procession**

The Directory of Masses for Children suggests this is a good time to process with symbols and creative elements rather than at the Procession of Gifts.

Therefore, symbols children have created in memory of the student being grieved could be carried in as part of the Procession and/or as a liturgical movement accompanying the procession. Symbols, which could be carried in, include:

- An altar cloth with written dedications, drawings, messages, symbols for the deceased prepared by the class or friends.
- Prayer cloths or flags for the deceased.
- A book of dedications, messages, poems, drawings.
- Large symbols of new life/hope/change- eg butterflies, balloons, flowers,
- Memorabilia for/from the family- eg photographs, symbols of home life
- Memorabilia and symbols for and from friends (eg music, drink cup, lunch box, item of clothing)
- Memorabilia and selected symbols for and from class/es (eg desk/ folder/artwork)
- Items for and from the deceased's association with the school (eg musical instrument, sporting item, uniform, jersey, hat)
- Banners/pall prepared for use at rituals

■ Sign of the Cross and greeting

The wording here can really set the theme/mood of the celebration and should be negotiated with the celebrant.

■ Penitential rite: (Not normally used in funeral services, but possible examples include:

Jesus, you also suffered a violent death at the hands of strangers. Lord have mercy

Jesus, you died that we may have life...

Jesus, your resurrection gives us hope over the fear of death....

Jesus, you promised eternal life for those who believed in you....

Jesus, you promised: "Do not be afraid, I am with you"...

Jesus, you sent the Holy Spirit to be with us always....

Jesus, you call on us to forgive those who sin against us...

Jesus, you taught us a new way to respond to violence and hate....

- Rite of blessing and sprinkling/Eulogy

An explanation/account of the symbols carried in procession, or other symbols of the deceased can be done here. Also poems may be read, or accounts of good times, happy times in the life of the deceased can be told here. Some of the messages in the book could be read out.

There could be a rite of sprinkling of the symbols and/or the gathered community here, especially if there is a climate of uncertainty and fear. This is also a link with our and their baptism.

- A PowerPoint celebration of the life of the deceased can be used here, or a dance/movement can be done in celebration of the life of the deceased, or a symbolic movement placing the deceased in the hands of God can be devised.
- Opening prayer – eg

Creator God, you watch over us in life and death. You give us life and welcome us into your presence when this life is over. We thank you for the gift of the life of [Name of person] among us. We are sad that he/she is no longer with us, but we believe he/she is now with you forever. We ask that you help us and his/her family and friends to remember his/her with happiness and to create a special place for his/her in our hearts... We make our prayer through Jesus, our friend and our brother.

Liturgy of the Word

- First reading: Old or New Testament

For young people, they should be short and have a message of hope or consolation.

Examples: Wisdom 4:7-15;; Isaiah 41:9b-10, 13 (See translations below)

- Responsorial psalm – preferably sung
- Second reading – New Testament

Examples: Thessalonians: 13-14, 18; Revelation 14:13

- Gospel acclamation – should be sung
- Gospel – should never be omitted nor paraphrased. For young people, consider using only one reading- a gospel passage.

Examples: John 14:1-6; John 6: 51-59; John 11: 32-38, 40.

- (Consider retelling the gospel in children's language and concepts as part of the homily.
- Gospel may be read in parts when appropriate
- Homily by priest or lay person. DOMC allows for another person to deliver the homily if the priest feels it more appropriate. Dialogue with children can be helpful.

See below for examples of translations for children.

- Prayers of Faithful: (include prayers for deceased, family of deceased, friends of deceased; for all who are grieving the deceased, for those who helped/cared for the deceased; for all who die this day; for hope, for the future, for courage).
- Examples:

We remember with gratitude the gift that the life of Name was for us- his/her friendship, joy, smiles, intelligence (etc.) Lord hear us

We ask for God's special presence for the family of Name. That their belief in God's love for them, and our support will help them through their pain and sorrow. Lord hear us.

We pray for ourselves- we who are sad at the loss of Name from our school community. That we will always remember what he/she meant for us and keep his/her memory alive. Lord hear us.

We pray for all who are frightened or worried by the sudden death of Name. That we will remember Jesus' words not to be afraid and his promise to be always with us.

We pray for the police, volunteers and other workers investigating Name's death. That through their dedication and persistence, justice will be achieved for [person].

Let us pray for courage, faith and hope in God's promises to us. That we will find ways to remember Name and believe that he/she is now safe with God forever.

Let us thank God for our St Name's school community and the many ways in which we are made to feel safe and among friends who care for us.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

PREPARATION of the GIFTS

- Procession of Gifts

The DOMC recommends only the elements of bread and wine be brought up here. All other symbols should form part of the entrance procession.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

- Preface
- Preface acclamation: Holy, Holy, Holy...
- Prayer of consecration
- Memorial acclamation: Christ has died...
- Prayer and doxology: Through him...
- Concluding acclamation: Great Amen

Communion rite

- The Lord's Prayer
- Sign of peace
- Fraction rite / breaking of the bread / Lamb of God
- Communion song or antiphon
- Distribution of Communion
- Thanksgiving after Communion: song or silence
- Prayer after Communion

Concluding rite

- Blessing or prayer over people

Some appropriate examples:

May our God, who has promised to be always with us, bring us courage and peace.

May God's love touch our lives and help us in our sadness and fear.

- Dismissal
- Recessional hymn

Some other points:

While the emphasis should be on joy and hope and celebration of a life, the liturgy should allow the community to grieve- so choice of hymns, prayers, symbols or reflection should make some provision for allowing people to express emotions of sorrow, pain, grief- without making it too maudlin.

Somewhere in the homily, it might be appropriate to use one of the many children's storybooks about death to assist in understanding and grieving.

Some translations of scripture for young people:

Wisdom 4:7-15

Good people, even if they die young, will find a home with God. The number of our days is not what makes people respectable, nor is the number of years we live a true measure of how worthwhile our life has been. Understanding what is right is better than grey hairs; a life of goodness and joy is better than old age. People who live like this do what God wants and God loves them.

Revelation 14:13

I John heard a voice from heaven say to me: "Write this down! How fortunate are those who live and die believing in Jesus! Now they can rest forever, because their good deeds go with them to a home in God.

Isaiah 41:9b-10, 13.

God says: "I will not turn away from you. I have chosen you, I call you my child. Do not be afraid, because I am with you. I am your God, after all! I will give you strength. I will help you; I will hold you up, for I am your God, who holds you by the hand. Remember: I say to you- do not be frightened, I will be there to help you."

Thessalonians 4: 13-18

We want you to be very certain, brothers and sisters, about those who have died. Do not despair about them, like those people who have no hope or faith. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and it will be the same for all who have died believing in Jesus. They will have a home with God. You should comfort one another with these words.

John 14:16

Jesus said to his disciples:

Do not be frightened. Trust in God and trust in me. There are many rooms in God's house- I would have told you if there were not. I am going now to prepare a place for you...I will return to take you with me so where I am going, you may be there too.