



Preparing for a Catholic Funeral



Catholic Burial Traditions

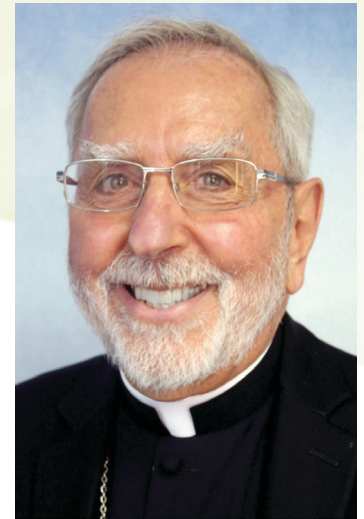
PROMOTING A CULTURE OF CATHOLIC BURIAL

*Coping with the Death
of Your Loved One*

www.catholicburialtraditions.org

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus,

The Catholic Cemetery Conference (CCC) strives to provide information, training, best practices and guidance for Catholic Cemeteries throughout the United States and Canada. CCC's mission is to promote, to educate and to inculcate a culture of Catholic burial. Burying the dead is a Corporal Work of Mercy and an essential part of the Church's mission.



We live in the hope of the resurrection promised by Christ who spoke of the human person as a temple of the Holy Spirit. For that reason care and respect for the deceased matters greatly. The Church strives to assist grieving families in laying their loved ones to rest and provides support and comfort to the family and loved ones of the deceased.

These materials and videos presented by the CCC spell out what that care and respect needs to look like through the whole burial process. From pre-planning for death to the Vigil, to the Funeral Mass and the Rite of Committal, these materials and videos provide information on how Catholic Cemeteries accompany families in this difficult time.

Likewise, lesson plans are presented in order to introduce children and young people to the Rites of Christian Burial, outlining how and why the Church treats the human body in death with the utmost respect and dignity.

The burial or entombment of the deceased person's body or cremated remains is central to the Church's mission. The hope of CCC is that these materials will assist bishops, priests, Catholic cemeterians and pastoral educators to inform our Catholic people of the Church's approach to death and burial of loved ones.

Choicest blessings!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerald Kicanas".

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Episcopal Advisor for the Catholic Cemetery Conference
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Tucson

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Confraternity of Christian Doctrine “Scripture Readings for Funerals (taken from the Lectionary for Mass)” – Readings from the Old Testament 1-7; Reading I from the New Testament during the Easter Season 1-4; Reading II from the New Testament 1-15; and Gospel 1-19 are reprinted with permission and subject to the following copyright:

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What is grief?

Grief is the psychological, emotional, social, physical and spiritual response to a loss. It is a reaction that is normal and a natural part of existence. As human beings, we love and bond with one another. When those bonds are changed due to a physical death, our mind, body and spirit will react to the loss.

Does everyone grieve in the same way, and how long will it last?

How we process a loss is a unique experience. No one grieves in the same way. There are many different factors that influence how a person will grieve. Contrary to what friends, family or society may say, there are no definite stages or patterns of how we grieve. It is helpful to remember that the way you are grieving is the perfect way for you. There is no right way to grieve, there is only YOUR way, which you must discover for yourself. To endure your sorrow, you must face your loss and give full expression to your grief. It is important to be patient with yourself and let the process resolve naturally. There is no specific timetable for the grief process. Grief is like a tunnel whose entrance closes behind you, and the only way out is to pass fully through.

What are the symptoms of grief?

The death of a loved one is a major life event that affects us emotionally, spiritually, socially, psychologically, and physically. Because mourning is the most unique, yet difficult, work we will ever have to do, we will often experience a level of emotional pain unfamiliar to us after a loved one has died. We may feel as if our lives - and emotions - are spinning out of control. And, because we have never had to deal with feelings of such enormous intensity, we can be confused, frightened and overwhelmed when they surface. It is in this phase of grief that we are faced with intense feelings of guilt, anger, loneliness, helplessness, sadness, fear, anxiety and panic - among many others - and few of us have had practice confronting and engaging such emotions until now.

Why does it seem that my family members and I are grieving differently?

Families can have certain personal and cultural expectations about the 'right' way to grieve, and judgments are often made about the length or appropriateness of a member's mourning.

The family system comprises of a complex set of unique human relationships, some close and bonded, others, perhaps, not so intensely. Because every human relationship in a family system is unique, and because every member is an individual, every grief reaction in that family will be unique. Simply put, no family members will grieve in the same way, or within the same time frame. As each family collectively and individually grieves its lost member, survivors will find themselves renegotiating their roles within the family system and with each other. When this necessary, but difficult, work of renegotiating is done, the family will come forth in a new, reinvented form.

Where can I go to help process my feelings of grief?

One of the greatest gifts during mourning is the presence of a strong support system. Well-meaning family members, friends, and co-workers are often good at providing the practical necessities, but often, unintentionally fall short when it comes to the proper emotional and psychological support. Although the sharing of feelings with family and friends during mourning can be useful, the bereaved are often left with inappropriate advice and unrealistic timetables for their grief, adding to their already confused and tumultuous feelings.

Bereavement support groups provide an excellent opportunity for mourners to share their feelings and experiences in a caring, non-judgmental, confidential setting. These are not therapy groups. Rather, group facilitators are trained to provide information about the grief process and conduct discussions on a variety of topics pertaining to loss. Participants can find education, affirmation and hope within these settings. Another source of emotional support can be found in individual counseling. For many reasons, some bereaved people require a deeper level of assistance and need to resolve their grief issues working one-on-one with a professional therapist who is trained to provide the proper psychological guidance for them.

What can I do to help myself grieve?

To successfully resolve our grief, we first need to engage it. To weaken the powerful grip of our pain, we need to find ways to actively tap into it and dilute it, little by little. How we do this connects us to our grief. When we “connect” to our grief, we choose appropriate ways to encounter it, usually for manageable periods. These activities or rituals are important because, over time, they can serve to soften and eventually dissipate the pain. People who make the connection to their grief through words will often find themselves writing about their losses.

Those who strongly connect to their grief through the spoken word might find themselves talking about the loved one to others or sharing experiences in a support group or therapy group. Those with musical sensibilities or talents might engage their grief while playing an instrument, composing or simply listening to favorite, shared musical pieces. Some might page through old photo albums - or create new ones - while others will mourn while walking or running on a favorite path. Still others will create memorials through a familiar hobby such as painting, sewing, or woodworking. Strong connections are also obviously made through faith traditions and prayer. However, there is one way of connecting to grief that can bring mixed emotions - visiting the cemetery. The cemetery (or mausoleum) can represent treasured, sacred space to the mourner, but it also confirms the stark reality of death.

Perceptions about the cemetery can also vary because of ethnic, cultural, spiritual, and familial influences and preferences. Those who connect to their loss at the gravesite can find it to be a place of true mourning. While it is a spot that teaches us repeatedly that the loss is final, it is also a space where our most beloved memories reside. Many who grieve at the gravesite express their connection to the loved one by planting flowers or by praying, speaking or reading (aloud or silently) during the visit. The cemetery can help mourners realize and appreciate their wonderful ties to the past while, over time, they gain strength and inspiration for the future. We need to confront and engage grief if we are to ultimately resolve it. The ways that we choose to do this will vary, and visiting the cemetery is one.

Where is God?

The death of a loved one can affect us spiritually. It is natural and normal that we cry out to God in our anguish. Some experience a deepening of their faith during grief, but many may struggle with feelings of anger and abandonment in their questioning and search for a meaning for the death. These unfamiliar and confusing emotions can cause us to seek both explanation and solace. The guidance of a priest or certified spiritual director conversant with this aspect of the grief process can be invaluable.

Your general health can absolutely be impacted by the loss and the significant stresses it brings, and any symptoms or concerns that develop should be discussed with your health care professional immediately.

How can I help my child during this time of loss?

There are many misperceptions concerning childhood grief that have resulted in children becoming the ‘forgotten’ mourners in society. Death is a fact of daily life that is widely reflected in the media, yet we remain a grief-avoiding culture. We do not like to think of children as experiencing a certain level of loss and emotional pain, so we often try to spare them the realities of death. The truth is that children love, bond and then need to uniquely grieve their losses, just as adults do. When a death occurs, we must be aware, as adults, of our own grief needs, keeping them separate from those of the child. Adults need to affirm and support a child’s grief. We need to create an empathic environment for the child where he or she can express deep feelings and be understood from a child’s point of view.

Developmental psychology tells us that a child senses loss as early as infancy. Pre-school children are aware of death but generally view it as temporary and reversible. Grade-school children, particularly as chronological age increases, develop an ability to think abstractly and understand that death is irreversible. Younger children will require literal, concrete explanations about death. They will also have less vocabulary available to them to explain their feelings and may require alternative venues for their grief. Adolescents, while struggling with social pressures and the developmental tasks of separation and the establishment of independence, also straddle the world between childhood and adulthood and their grief will reflect that. Teens should understand that they are entitled to support while taking all the time they need to mourn.

Support groups designed specifically to deal with childhood and adolescent loss issues are available in numerous communities in addition to individual and family counseling. There are also many excellent books that can help a child or teen deal with loss. Children, like adults, need to know that it's all right to speak about the death, cry, and feel sad and lonely for as long as they need to.

Should my child attend the funeral?

Attendance at the vigil and funeral are ways for children and teens to honor and affirm the person who has died. It is also an opportunity for a family to teach its young people that life will go on after this death. Rituals are ways to express loss. Children, like adults, need to ritualize their losses, and going to the vigil, funeral liturgy, or cemetery can allow them to do so. They can then start on the important healing task of establishing a new relationship with the deceased.

Realistically, the decision for a child or teen to participate at the vigil, funeral liturgy, or cemetery will ultimately depend upon parental, ethnic and cultural norms and preferences. It is generally thought, however, that children should be allowed to attend if they wish, but never forced at any point. If a child or adolescent does attend, it is imperative that he or she has the proper age-appropriate physical and emotional support before, during, and after the experience. We as adults need to talk about what the child will see or hear and be very observant of his or her reactions. In doing so, the child will 'teach' us what the death experience means to him or her, and we can respond accordingly.

How am I going to handle the holidays and special days ahead?

There are phenomena called anniversary and holiday reactions that are common to almost all who have lost a loved one. In short, these are times of temporarily intensified grief. These normal upsurges in emotion seem to occur most often around birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special occasions. However, for many people, certain sights, sounds and scents will trigger emotions at any point throughout the year. It is during these events that we are most painfully reminded of the absence of our loved ones.

As a result, we experience heightened sadness and other intense emotions. In addition, having developed some sense of security in the uniformity of our everyday lives following the death, we can be easily disturbed by the unpredictability of a holiday or special occasion. It is important to realize that distress at these ordinarily 'happy' times is normal - it is unrealistic to think otherwise. In most cases, these very intense feelings are transitory. Holidays are bittersweet following a death. We think about our loved ones more intensely, replay past events and compare.

Some families restructure their celebrations completely after a death while some continue their rituals exactly as they had before. Still, others agree to keep some traditions and discard others. Ultimately, each family will need to renegotiate and decide what observances best meet its individual and collective needs following a loss. Some parish-based support groups and hospice organizations provide special sessions for those needing extra help "getting through the holidays".





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Acknowledgments



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