

## **Prayers and Funeral Rites After Miscarriage or Stillbirth Office of Worship: Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend**

Many members of the faithful are unaware that, liturgically speaking, situations involving miscarriages (at any gestational age) or stillbirths should be treated the same as those involving other children who die before baptism. There are various prayers and rites available to draw from, and it is important to help the family identify which rites would fit their pastoral needs.

It is important to note that most of these rites can be employed (with appropriate adaptations) even if the body of the infant is not present. In that case, some other suitable reminder of the child may be present during the rites.

### **Prayers after Death, and Blessing of Parents**

The “Prayers after Death” and the other “Related Rites and Prayers” in the *Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)* Part I may be employed in the home or hospital soon after the death of the child, with the wording adapted according to the circumstances. The *OCF* recommends several Scripture readings as well (such as 1 John 3:1-2; Psalm 23; Matthew 11:25-30; and Mark 10:13-16).

In addition, there is an “Order for the Blessing of Parents after a Miscarriage,” found in the *Book of Blessings*, no. 279.

### **Order for the Naming and Commendation of an Infant Who Died before Birth**

There are times when the parents may greatly benefit from the opportunity to name their child. For this purpose, the Archdiocese of Saint Louis developed an “Order for the Naming and Commendation of an Infant Who Died before Birth.” It includes a short rite of tracing the infant with the Sign of the Cross – an action that can be taken even if baptism was not possible. This order also includes the Blessing of the Body and the Prayer of Commendation from “The Rite of Final Commendation of an Infant” as found in *OCF* 337.

### **Funeral Rites**

The above rites are all good options in the case of a miscarriage or stillbirth. However, they should not replace any funeral rites that may be requested by the family.

As noted in *OCF* #237: “Funeral rites may be celebrated for children whose parents intended them to be baptized but who died before baptism. In these celebrations the Christian community entrusts the child to God’s all-embracing love and finds strength in this love and in Jesus’ affirmation that the kingdom of God belongs to little children (Mt 19:14).”

Various funeral rites for children (paralleling those offered for adults) are available in *OCF* Part II, including a vigil, the funeral liturgies (within and outside Mass), and rites of committal.

### **Overview of Funeral Rites for Children Who Died before Baptism**

The **Vigil for a Deceased Child** (*OCF* 243), the **Funeral Mass** (*OCF* 276) or **Funeral Liturgy outside Mass** (*OCF* 295), and the **Rites of Committal** all include options for prayers specific to a child who died before baptism.

### **Funeral Mass Options:**

The Roman Missal includes Mass prayers “For the Funeral of a Child Who Died before Baptism” (Masses for the Dead, Part I, Option F).

The Missal also includes the following note as part of that Mass:

“Should a child whom the parents wished to be baptized die before baptism, the diocesan bishop, taking into consideration pastoral circumstances, may permit the funeral to be celebrated in the home of the deceased child.”

**\* \* \* Bishop Rhoades has granted this permission in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. This may take the form of a Liturgy of the Word (Funeral outside Mass) or – if it can be suitably arranged – an actual funeral Mass in the home of the child.**

There are also special prayers found in *OCF* Part V – two for “a child who died before baptism” (no. 399, 13 and 14), and one for a miscarried or stillborn child (no. 399, 15). They can be used as the Opening Prayer/Collect in the vigil or in any form of the funeral liturgy. These three prayers are also reproduced below so that each can be printed for more convenient use alongside the Missal when praying the Funeral Mass of a child who died before baptism.

### **Other Funeral Liturgy Adaptations**

As noted in the *Order of Christian Funerals*, for unbaptized children the sprinkling with holy water, use of a pall, and incensation of the body are omitted.

If the body cannot be present at the funeral, then the reception of the body and final commendation would be omitted, and prayers referencing the presence of the body would not be used.

### **Rites of Committal**

The Rite of Committal (*OCF* 319) is used at the cemetery when the final commendation is celebrated within the funeral liturgy

The Rite of Committal with Final Commendation (*OCF* 327) is used at the cemetery if the final commendation is not celebrated as part of the funeral liturgy.

While both the above committal rights are options, the Rite of Final Commendation for an Infant starting on *OCF* 337 (and also included within the above-mentioned “Order of Naming and Commendation”) is particularly appropriate in the case of a stillborn baby or of an infant who dies shortly after birth. Especially if the body is not present or a burial is not possible, this short rite can be adapted according to the circumstances and may be used in the home, hospital, or at the cemetery. If a formal burial is also to take place, the act of committal could be done immediately after the prayer of commendation.

### **Additional Collect Prayers from the Order of Christian Funerals**

*OCF* 399,13 – A child who died before baptism

O Lord, whose ways are beyond understanding,

listen to the prayers of your faithful people:

that those weighed down by grief

at the loss of this [little] child

may find reassurance in your infinite goodness.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*OCF 399,14* – A child who died before baptism

God of all consolation,

searcher of mind and heart,

the faith of these parents [N. and N.] is known to you.

Comfort them with the knowledge

that the child for whom they grieve

is entrusted now to your loving care.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*OCF 399,15* – A stillborn child or miscarriage

(substitute “this child” for “him/her” if gender unknown)

Lord God,

ever caring and gentle,

we commit to your love this little one,

quickened to life for so short a time.

Enfold him/her in eternal life.

We pray for his/her parents

who are saddened by the loss of their child.

Give them courage

and help them in their pain and grief.

May they all meet one day

in the joy and peace of your kingdom.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.