

A SERVICE TO FOLLOW THE BIRTH OF A STILLBORN CHILD, OR THE DEATH OF A NEWLY-BORN CHILD

NOTES

- 1 This pastoral service will usually take place as soon as possible after the birth has occurred, though in special circumstances some delay may be necessary; preparation will normally include appropriate pastoral conversation with the bereaved parents. This will enable the parents to be prepared for the service and may provide helpful pastoral information that can be incorporated into the service, especially at the point where extempore prayer is indicated.
- 2 The need for privacy and quiet should be considered, but the most appropriate locale for the service is where the death has occurred. It should be clearly understood that this is not a funeral service and is necessarily brief. A quite separate funeral service will be held in due course.
- 3 Those present for the service, in addition to the parents, may include such people as: other family members as the parents desire, hospital staff, and an elder of the local congregation.
- 4 The parents should have the opportunity wherever possible to help prepare the child for the service, washing the child before dressing him/her, perhaps using clothing they have especially chosen beforehand, and using a special memento or cuddly toy purchased or given in anticipation of the birth. (In hospital, the staff will be helpful in this respect.) The parents may be encouraged to hold the child while the service is being conducted.
- 5 Where the family are related in some way to a congregation, this service should normally be conducted by their minister. If a chaplain has been involved in ministering to the family in hospital, it would also be appropriate for him/her to share in the service in some way. Where it is not possible for the minister to be present, a chaplain may take responsibility for the service.
- 6 A list of helpful literature for both the minister and bereaved family can be found on the CD-rom.
- 7 Uniting Church practice, along with the practice of the Church catholic, clearly indicates that it is inappropriate to do anything in this service that may suggest that it is a baptism. Therefore, water should not be used at any point. It may be helpful to use language such as the following when talking to parents who request a baptismal service:
‘It is not the practice of the Uniting Church to baptise in situations such as this. God’s love for, and acceptance of, your child does not depend on whether he/she is baptised. However, we do have a service which we believe you may find meaningful and helpful.’
- 8 Where desired, this service may also be used in the event of an early miscarriage, omitting 4 The Sign of the Cross.
- 9 If a candle and flowers are used in the service, they may be given to the parents. (*Please note:* In hospital settings, lighting a candle may not be permitted. Always consult hospital staff first.)

A Service to follow the Birth of a Stillborn Child, or the Death of a Newly-born Child

1 INTRODUCTION

Attention should be given to the creation of a worship space. For example, a vase of flowers, cross and Bible may be provided. Where circumstances permit, a candle may be lit.

N refers to the name(s) of the child, where he/she has been named. If no name has been given, the alternative may be used.

The child may be held by the mother or father or other appropriate person.

The minister says:

We gather here in grief and pain.
In this moment there is no understanding,
only the emptiness of sorrow and loss.

The minister may add:

N/This little child has died
during birth (or, even before he/she was born).

We are overwhelmed by the mystery of life and death
that we have experienced.

Yet we remember, in our confusion and distress,
that the eternal God is here,
the One whose love is seen in Jesus Christ.

On the cross, Jesus bears our pain.
Through the cross, God shares our pain.
In the Spirit, God is with us
offering comfort, peace and love.

2 SCRIPTURE VERSES

We cry out to God:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
Must I bear this grief for ever,
and have sorrow in my heart day after day?

Psalm 13:1-2

and/or

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

Psalm 22:1-2

Some or all of the following verses may be read.

We hear again the promises of God:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning,
great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

Jesus said:

Come to me, all you that are weary
and whose load is heavy,
and I will give you rest ...
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:28-29

What can separate us from the love of Christ?
Can hardship or distress?
No, in all this we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35, 37-39

3 PRAYER

In this prayer, N and N refers to the names of the parents.

Where appropriate, the names of other children in the family may also be included.

Let us pray:

God of love,
we thank you for the assurance of your presence.
Help us to trust in the promises you have made.

Here extempore prayers may be offered.

Surround N and N, their family and friends,
with your love and grace.
Comfort them in their sorrow and fill them with your peace.
Strengthen their faith in you
and bless them with confidence and courage
to face the future,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

4 THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Here, N refers to the name of the child.

If there is no name, the alternatives may be used.

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the child.

The parents may be given the opportunity, if desired, each to share in marking the sign of the cross on their child.

During the prayer ('God of compassion ...') it is appropriate for the minister to place a hand upon the child.

God says:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.

Jeremiah 1:5

And we remember that Jesus welcomed little children,
took them in his arms and blessed them.

Luke 18:15-17

For N/all, he lived.

For N/all, he died.

For N/all, he rose again.

He has welcomed N/this child
into his eternal kingdom.

| Therefore, as a mark of that love and grace,
| we place on him/her the sign of the cross.

Let us pray:

God of compassion,
help us to believe that N/this child,
a lamb of your flock, is in your gentle care
through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

5 THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

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

or

**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.**

6 BLESSING

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Based on Philippians 4:7

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.

or

May the Lord bless you and guard you;
may the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
may the Lord look kindly on you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

Amen.

As the service concludes, the parents may continue to hold the child, as may others invited to do so by them. There may be a need for expressions of grief and farewells before the child is handed into the care of a member of the hospital staff or suitable person.