

Episcopal Rite for Pregnancy Loss or Stillbirth

Opening Sentences and Prayers

Officiant

In the name of God, the giver of Life
who creates and loves us all.

The Lord be with you.

People

And also with you.

Officiant

Let us pray.

Loving God, source of Life and Love, we come before you this day with aching hearts. We had hoped to gather in the midst of your holy people to celebrate with *N.* and *N.* the birth of their child. Instead, we are here to mourn with them this unexpected and profound loss. O Lord, we cannot understand why this gift has been snatched away, and we pray that your Holy Spirit be present with us as we gather here this day. Bless *N.* and *N.* with the assurance of your love, and fill them with the knowledge that you are a companion to them in their grief. We do this in the name of your own Child who died and rose again, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

N. and N., we are here with you today to acknowledge your loss, to be with you in your sorrow, and to be a sign of God's assurance that you are loved.

This segment should be included only if the family is comfortable with the idea of naming and representing the child. In the case of stillbirth, the parents may opt to have the child's body present, in which case the representation will not be necessary.

The psalmist and the prophets promise that God knew your child while *she* was still in *N.*'s womb, and called that child by name. What name have you given to your child?

N./N.: We have named our child *N.*

N. and N., as you prepared your home to receive *N.*, you gathered those things that would keep *her* warm, happy and healthy. You are invited to present now that which represents for you the child you have lost.

The parents may present a toy, a piece of clothing, a plant, or some other item that will be prominently displayed for the remainder of the service.

N./N.: We present this _____ as a symbol of our child, *N.*

Let us pray.

God, you have searched us out and known us, and we are yours. We dedicate to you the child, *N.*, beloved [though never seen] by her parents. We are limited, O God; we cannot see as you see. [Therefore we present to you this _____ as a symbol of the child, *N.*] We ask that you be present to us now as we listen to your Word, that we might hear in it the assurance of your love and companionship at this time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Readings

The parents, if able, or the officiant may choose two or three of the following readings.

Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 43:1-4a

Isaiah 49:15-16a

Jeremiah 29:11-13a

Psalms

23 or 91:1-4 or 121

New Testament

Romans 8:38-39

1 John 3:1-2a
Revelation 21:1-5
Gospel
Mark 4:35-39
Luke 9:46-48
John 6:37-39

Homily and Reflections

The officiant may here offer a brief homily or allow the parents to express their own feelings and thoughts. Silence may be kept.

Prayers

Officiant

Let us pray.

Lord, you have blessed us with feeling and emotions, allowing us to love as you love, but also to grieve as you grieve. We bring before you the many conflicted emotions within us, and ask you to bless them to be a source strength even among the sorrow. *Amen.*

If possible, the following litany will be read alternately by the parents, petitions by one, response by the other.

We bring to you our anger, Lord, which keeps us from turning to you for comfort.

Bless us in our anger, O Lord.

We bring to you our confusion, Lord, as we try to make sense of this senseless loss.

Bless us in our confusion, O Lord.

We bring to you our pain, Lord, as we ache for the child we will never hold.

Bless us in our pain, O Lord.

We bring to you our sorrow, Lord, in the unfulfilled hopes and dreams for this child.

Bless us in our sorrow, O Lord.

We bring to you our emptiness, Lord, the hole left in our home and hearts.

Bless us in our emptiness, O Lord.

We bring to you our loneliness, Lord, where we feel exiled from consolation and comfort.

Bless us in our loneliness, O Lord.

Officiant

God of compassion and companionship, N. and N. now stand before you in the fragile beauty of their human. Bless them in their anger, confusion, pain, sorrow, emptiness, and loneliness. Grant them assurance that nothing can separate them from your love. Grant them peace of mind in their confusion and healing in their pain. Grant them consolation in their sorrow, fill them with your Holy Spirit in their emptiness, and grant them companionship in their journey. Assure them that as the world rushes by, unaware, Jesus will stop by the wayside and be with them.

Officiant [takes the item representing the child from the parents, and] joins the hands of the parents with one another.

God, we release to you this child, lost to the world but found in your presence. Enfold N. (this child) in the arms of your mercy. Renew the bond between N. and N., that they do not find their hands empty. We ask your Holy Spirit to fill N. and N., that they may be honest with each other in their sorrow and pain, patient with each other in their fragility, forgiving each other when their pain causes them to lash out. Let them be a source of strength and love for each other.

Bless their families and friends and all those whose hearts are filled with sadness at this loss. Grant them the assurance that comes with the hope of Resurrection. Grant to all those who sorrow the spirit of faith and courage that they may have the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience, not sorrowing without hope, but trusting in your goodness; through the one who is the Resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

*The Lord's Prayer may be recited here.
If the officiant is a priest, an appropriate benediction is said, then*

Go forth in peace, in the knowledge and love of Christ.
People: Thanks be to God.

By The Rev. Nancy L. Moore, found in Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated. Elizabeth Rankin Geitz, Marjorie A. Burke, Ann Smith (eds.). Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2000.

*The opening sentences and portions of the final prayer are from A New Zealand Prayer Book. From the Episcopal Church:
"http://www.episcopalchurch.org/41685_55316_ENG_HTM.htm"
www.episcopalchurch.org/41685_55316_ENG_HTM.htm*