



No 3. The Role of the Christian Community

When a member of Christ's body is sick or dies the Christian community is called to a ministry of comfort and consolation. St Paul reminds us that when a member of the body of Christ suffers all suffer with that member (1 Cor 12:26).

The Church calls each baptised member to participate in this ministry by caring for the sick and dying, praying for the dead and comforting those who mourn.

The Church that welcomed the loved one through the saving waters of Baptism bids farewell, handing the deceased back to God.

The Church that welcomed the loved one through the saving waters of Baptism bids farewell

Members of the Christian community help those who are facing suffering and death to find their way through the difficult path ahead. They may sit quietly at the side of the sick, dying or those who are grieving as companions and listeners offering comfort and prayer. They may assist with routine tasks associated with daily living. They may keep watch with the family in the time before the burial and help to prepare the rites that farewell their loved ones.

The Church has a rich treasure of prayer and worship which provides a sense of faith and hope, particularly when words are difficult. Members of the faith community are called to support the family especially by their presence and active participation in the rites of Christian burial. The Christian community, bearing the tenderness of the Church and the comfort of faith, offers consolation to those who grieve.

The Church has a rich treasure of prayer and worship

Many communities form special teams to minister to the sick and the bereaved. The members of these groups are an important parish presence as they visit families at the time of sickness and death and provide

on going care and support after the funeral. They may also assist in preparing special rites and prayers in the parish that may be celebrated at various times during the Liturgical Year such as Anointing of the Sick Masses, prayers at anniversaries of death, pilgrimages to the cemetery and Sunday Intercessions.

Parishioners may sit quietly as companions and listeners

The team may also prepare a special book where the names of the dead may be inscribed. The book is displayed in November, traditionally the month when the Christian community remembers those who have died.

Priests, as teachers and ministers of consolation, ordinarily preside at the funeral rites. When no priests (or deacons) are available, the Church encourages the community to delegate a lay person on its behalf to lead the funeral liturgy. In some areas of Tasmania lay people already lead the rites of Christian burial. Lay men and women also serve as readers, musicians, ushers, pall bearers and Ministers of Communion.

The community may delegate a trained lay person to lead the funeral liturgy

Members of the community who are called to minister to the grieving and lead the funeral rites would first undertake specific training and formation. This formation would include learning about the many faces of grief and suffering, the ministry of consolation and the rites of the Church. It is a ministry that requires sensitivity, compassion and the ability to listen and communicate with a variety of people, especially in difficult circumstances.

Grief

People react in different ways.

Grief lasts longer than a week.

Longer term support is needed.

Remember anniversaries.

Become more familiar with the grieving process.

Finding words

Listen compassionately and offer reassurance rather than advice.

Offer more than sympathy. Be with the person at this time and empathise with them by placing yourself in their position.

Avoid platitudes such as 'It's all for the best.' and 'It was God's will.'

Ask open ended questions such as 'How have you been going?' or 'How has it been for you this week?'

Let people know you have been thinking of them and praying for them.

When words are difficult consider gestures and acts of kindness.