

**CEREMONY OF  
NAMING AND COMMENDATION  
FOR AN INFANT  
WHO DIED BEFORE BIRTH**



*embrace*

Archdiocese of Atlanta

The loss of a child during pregnancy, stillbirth or very early in their life is one of the most difficult things that mothers and fathers deal with. Often the responses that they receive are inappropriate even if well intentioned. Eighteen months ago, I was presented with a proposal for a new ministry that would provide support and comfort to those grieving the loss of their unborn or newly born child. This ministry, *embrace*, has been conceived out of that grief and will provide families going through this difficult challenge with a sound spiritual response to their loss. I have asked our deacons to take the lead in bringing this ministry to the Archdiocese. Many of our married deacon clergy have experienced this loss first hand and can relate to the many challenges that are involved. Our priests also need to be aware of this ministry and the approach that we are taking to this critical need.

+Wilton D. Gregory  
Archbishop of Atlanta  
April 2012

Prayers and readings excerpted from the following books:

Order of Christian Funerals, 1985  
Roman Missal, 2010  
Rite of Baptism for Children, 1969  
Book of Blessings, 1987  
Lectionary for Mass, 1997

This ceremony is intended only for use within the Archdiocese of Atlanta.



1. In times of death and grief the Christian turns to the Lord and the Church for consolation and strength. This is especially true when a child dies before birth.
2. “In its pastoral ministry to the bereaved the Christian community is challenged in a particular way by the death of an infant or child. The bewilderment and pain that death causes can be overwhelming in this situation, especially for the parents and the brothers and sisters of the deceased child. The community seeks to offer support and consolation to the family during and after the time of the funeral rites” (*Order of Christian Funerals*, 238).
3. This ministry to the bereaved includes sacramental assistance: “[f]uneral rites may be celebrated for children whose parents intended them to be baptized but who died before baptism...” (*Order of Christian Funerals*, 237). However, the liturgical expression of assistance in grief is not limited to the funeral. The *Book of Blessings* offers a *Blessing of Parents after a Miscarriage*, which is intended “to assist the parents in their grief and console them with the blessing of God” (*Book of Blessings*, 279).
4. This ceremony is not intended to take the place of the above rituals, but pastoral experience has shown that an additional blessing is often desirable for ministry to those who have lost a child before birth. The opportunity for parents to name their deceased child before the Church’s representative, as they would have done in Baptism, allows them to take comfort in their child’s identity being known to and cared for by the Lord and the Church.
5. The minister should be attentive to the needs of the parents and other family members, and to this end the introduction to the *Order of Christian Funerals*, Part II: Funeral Rites For Children will be helpful.
6. If the deceased child has surviving brothers or sisters, it may be especially appropriate for them to serve as acolytes, readers, or musicians, if they are of a suitable age.
7. This ceremony may be used by a Priest or a Deacon, and also by a layperson, who follows the prayers and actions designated for a lay minister.

## INTRODUCTION

8. When the community has gathered, a suitable song may be sung, such as one of those given in Appendix I. The minister says:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All make the Sign of the Cross and reply:

**R. Amen.**

9. A minister who is a Priest or Deacon greets those present in the following or other suitable words, taken mainly from sacred Scripture.

May the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation, be with you all.

And all reply:

**R. And with your spirit.**

*[10. A lay minister greets those present in the following words:*

*Let us praise the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation. Blessed be God for ever.*

**R. Blessed be God for ever.]**

11. In the following or similar words, the minister prepares those present for the blessing.

For those who trust in God,  
in the pain of sorrow there is consolation,  
in the face of despair there is hope,  
in the midst of death there is life.

N., and N., as we mourn the death of your child we place ourselves in the hands of God and ask for strength, for healing, and for love.

## NAMING OF THE CHILD

12. The minister asks the parents:

What name do you give your child? (or: have you given?)

The parents respond:

N.

13. **The minister prays the following prayer:**

My brothers and sisters, the Lord is a faithful God who created us all after his own image. All things are of his making, all creation awaits the day of salvation. We now entrust the soul of **N.** to the abundant mercy of God, that our beloved child may find a home in his kingdom.

**All pray in silence for a few moments.**

14. **Then the minister continues:**

Receive the prayers of your faithful, Lord,  
and grant that those you allow to be weighed down  
by their longing for the child **N.**, taken from them,  
may be raised up by faith to hope in your compassion.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

**R. Amen.**

## READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

15. **A reader, another person present, or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture.**

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: **25:6a, 7-8b**

*The Lord God will destroy death for ever.*

On this mountain the Lord of hosts  
will provide for all peoples  
a feast of rich food.  
On this mountain he will destroy  
the veil that veils all peoples,  
The web that is woven over all nations;  
he will destroy death forever.  
The Lord God will wipe away  
the tears from all faces.

The Word of the Lord.

**R. Thanks be to God.**

16. Or any of the below options, found in Appendix II:

*Isaiah 49:8-13 – In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you.*

*Lamentations 3:17-26 – Hope in the Lord.*

*Romans 8:18-27 – In hope we were saved.*

*Hebrews 5:7-9 – Christ intercedes for us.*

*Matthew 11:25-30 – You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever and have revealed them to children.*

17. As circumstances suggest, the following or another Responsorial Psalm may be sung, or some other suitable chant.

**R. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.**

**Psalm 25**

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;  
teach me your paths,  
Guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my savior,  
and for you I wait all the day. **R.**

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,  
and your kindness are from of old.  
The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not;  
in your kindness remember me  
because of your goodness, O LORD. **R.**

Look toward me, and have pity on me,  
for I am alone and afflicted.  
Relieve the troubles of my heart,  
and bring me out of my distress. **R.**

Preserve my life, and rescue me;  
let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.  
Let integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
because I wait for you, O LORD. **R.**

10. As circumstances suggest, the minister may give those present a brief explanation of the biblical text, so that they may understand through faith the meaning of the celebration.

## INTERCESSIONS

18. The intercessions are then said. The minister introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. From the following those best suited to the occasion may be used or adapted, or other intentions that apply to the particular circumstances may be composed.

The minister says:

Let us pray to God who throughout the ages has heard the cries of parents.

**R. Lord, hear our prayer.**

Assisting minister:\*

For **N.**, that, like the Holy Innocents, he/she/they be held securely in God's loving embrace, we pray to the Lord. **R.**

Assisting minister:

For **N.** and **N.**, who know the pain of grief, that they might find solace in the example of Mary, who grieved by the Cross of her Son, we pray to the Lord. **R.**

[Assisting minister:

[For the brothers and sisters of **N.**, that, in sorrow as in all things, they would never be afraid to come to Jesus, who declared that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, we pray to the Lord. **R.**]

Assisting minister:

For the family of **N.**, that the Lord who restored the fortunes of the suffering Job might bestow hope and blessings upon them, who suffer greatly at the loss of their child, we pray to the Lord. **R.**

Assisting minister:

For all who have suffered the loss of a child, that they might find hope and consolation in Christ, as the Lord prophesied through Jeremiah: "Cease your cries of mourning, wipe the tears from your eyes. The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward..." we pray to the Lord. **R.**

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\* It is laudable for this assisting minister to be another family member or close friend.

19. After the intercessions the minister, in the following or similar words, invites all present to sing or say the Lord's Prayer.

Let us pray to the God of consolation and hope, as Christ has taught us:

All:

**Our Father . . .**

## **PRAYER OF BLESSING OVER PARENTS**

20. If desired, the minister may bless the parents of the infant using the following blessing taken from the *Book of Blessing* (292).

A minister who is a Priest or Deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched over the parents; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.

Compassionate God,  
soothe the hearts of N. and N.,  
and grant that through the prayers of Mary,  
who grieved by the Cross of her Son,  
you may enlighten their faith,  
give hope to their hearts,  
and peace to their lives.

Lord,  
grant mercy to all the members of this family  
and comfort them with the hope  
that one day we will all live with you,  
with your Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever.

**R. Amen.**

## **PRAYER OF COMMENDATION**

14. The minister then says the following prayer.

You are the author and sustainer of our lives, O God,  
you are our final home.  
We commend to you N., our child.  
Trusting in your mercy  
and in your all-embracing love,  
we pray that you give him/her/them happiness for ever.  
Turn also to us who have suffered this loss.



Strengthen the bonds of this family and our community.  
Confirm us in faith, in hope, and in love,  
so that we may bear your peace to one another  
and one day stand together with all the saints  
who praise you for your saving help.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**R. Amen.**

15. **The minister continues:**

Most merciful God,  
whose wisdom is beyond our understanding,  
surround the family of **N.** with your love,  
that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss,  
but have confidence in your goodness,  
and strength to meet the days to come.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**R. Amen.**

16. **The minister then says the following:**

Eternal rest grant unto him/her/**N.**, O Lord.

**R. And let perpetual light shine upon him/her/them.**

May he/she/**N.** rest in peace.

**R. Amen.**

May his/her/**N.**'s soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the  
mercy of God, rest in peace.

**R. Amen.**

## CONCLUSION

17. **A minister who is a Priest or Deacon concludes the ceremony by saying:**

Bow your heads and pray for God's blessing.

**All pray silently.**

**The Priest or Deacon, with hands extended, prays over the people:**

May the God of all consolation bless you,  
for in his unfathomable goodness he created the human race,  
and in the Resurrection of his Only Begotten Son  
he has given believers the hope of rising again.

**R. Amen.**

To us who are alive, may God grant pardon for our sins,  
and to all the dead, a place of light and peace.

**R. Amen.**

So may we all live happily for ever with Christ,  
whom we believe truly rose from the dead.

**R. Amen.**

**Then he blesses all present.**

And may the blessing of almighty God,  
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit,  
come down on you and remain with you for ever.

**R. Amen.**

*[18. A lay minister concludes the ceremony by signing himself or herself with the Sign of the Cross and saying:*

*May the love of God and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ  
bless and console us  
and gently wipe every tear from our eyes:  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

**R. Amen.]**

**19. The minister then concludes:**

Go in the peace of Christ.

**R. Thanks be to God.**

**20. It is preferable to end the celebration with a suitable song,  
including any of those found in Appendix I.**

## APPENDIX I: RECOMMENDED SONGS

These recommended hymns are taken from the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

The following antiphon may be sung with verses from Psalm 25, or separately.

May the angels lead you into  
paradise;  
may the martyrs come to welcome  
you  
and take you to the holy city,  
the new and eternal Jerusalem.

The following antiphon may be sung with verses from Psalm 116, or separately.

May choirs of angels welcome you  
and lead you to the bosom of  
Abraham;  
and where Lazarus is poor no longer,  
may you find eternal rest.

Whoever believes in me,  
even though that person die, shall  
live.

**R.** I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever lives and believes in me  
shall never die. **R.**

For all the saints who from their  
labors rest,  
Who thee by faith before the world  
confessed,  
Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress  
and their might;  
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-  
fought fight;  
Thou in the darkness drear their one  
true light:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship  
divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory  
shine;  
Yet all are one in thee, for all are  
thing:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

But, lo, there breaks a yet more  
glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright  
array:  
The King of glory passes on his way:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

**Text:** William W. How, 1823-1897

**Tune:** Sine Nomine 10.10.10 with Alleluias

**Music:** R. Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958

1. I know that my Redeemer lives!  
What joy the blest assurance gives!  
He lives, he lives, who once was  
dead;

He lives, my ever-living head!

2. He lives triumphant from the  
grave;

He lives eternally to save;  
He lives in majesty above;  
He lives to guide his Church in love.

3. He lives to grant me rich supply;  
He lives to guide me with his eye;  
He lives to comfort me when faint;  
He lives to hear my soul's complaint.

4. He lives to silence all my fears;  
He lives to wipe away my tears;  
He lives to calm my troubled heart;  
He lives all blessings to impart.

5. He lives to bless me with his love;  
He lives to plead for me above;  
He lives my hungry soul to feed;  
He lives to help in time of need.

6. He lives, my kind, wise, heav'nly  
friend;  
He lives and loves me to the end;  
He lives, and while he lives, I'll sing;  
He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and  
King!

7. He lives and grants me daily  
breath;  
He lives, and I shall conquer death;  
He lives my mansion to prepare;  
He lives to bring me safely there.

8. He lives, all glory to his name!  
He lives, my Savior, still the same;  
What joy this blest assurance gives;  
I know that my Redeemer lives!

**Text:** Based on Job 19:25 by Samuel Medley,  
1738-1799, alt.

**Tune:** Duke Street L.M.

**Music:** Attr. to John Hatton, c. 1710-1793

1. O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home;

2. Beneath the shadow of your throne  
Your saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is your arm alone,  
And our defense is sure.

3. Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting you are God,  
To endless years the same.

4. A thousand ages in your sight  
Are like an evening gone,  
Short as the watch that ends the night  
Before the rising sun.

5. Time, like an ever rolling stream,  
Bears all our lives away;  
They fly forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the op'ning day.

6. O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be now our guard while troubles last,  
And our eternal home.

**Text:** Based on Psalm 90, Isaac Watts, 1674-  
1748, alt.

**Tune:** St. Anne C.M.

**Music:** Attr. to William Croft, 1678-1727

1. Blest be the everlasting God,  
The Father of our Lord;  
Be his abounding mercy praised,  
His majesty adored.

2. When from the dead he raised his  
Son,  
To dwell with him on high,  
He gave our souls a lively hope  
That they should never die.

3. There's an inheritance divine  
Reserved against that day,

Which uncorrupted, undefiled,  
Can never waste away.

4. Saints by the pow'r of God are  
kept,  
Till their salvation come:  
We walk by faith as strangers here,  
But Christ shall call us home.

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748, alt.

Tune: St. Peter C.M.

Music: Alexander Robert Reingale, 1799-  
1877

### Refrain:

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

### Verses:

1. The strife is o'er, the battle done.  
The victory of life is won;  
The song of triumph has begun:  
Alleluia!

2. The pow'rs of death have done  
their worst,  
But Christ their legions has  
dispersed:  
Let shouts of praise and joy outburst:  
Alleluia!

3. On the third morn he rose again  
Glorious in majesty to reign;  
O let us swell the joyful strain:  
Alleluia!

4. He closed the yawning gates of  
hell,  
The bars from heav'n's high portals  
fell;  
Let hymns of praise his triumphs tell:  
Alleluia!

5. Lord, by your death on Calvary,  
From death's dread sting your people  
free,  
That we may live eternally:  
Alleluia!

Text: *Finita iam sunt praelia*, tr. by Francis  
Pott, 1832-1909, alt.

Tune: Victory 888 with alleluias

Music: Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, c.  
1525-1594, adapted with "Alleluias" by  
William Henry Monk, 1823-1899

1. May saints and angels lead you on,  
Escorting you where Christ has gone.  
Now he has called you, come to him  
Who sits above the seraphim.

2. Come to the peace of Abraham  
And to the supper of the Lamb:  
Come to the glory of the blessed,  
And to perpetual light and rest.

Text: Based on *In Paradisum*

Tune: Tallis' Canon L.M.

Music : Thomas Tallis, c. 1510-1585

## APPENDIX II: OPTIONAL SCRIPTURE READINGS

These Scriptural readings are taken from the *Book of Blessings: Blessing of Parents after a Miscarriage and the Order of Christian Funerals*.

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: 49:8-13

*In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you.*

Thus says the Lord:

In a time of favor I answer you,  
on the day of salvation I help you:  
and I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people,  
To restore the land  
and allot the desolate heritages,  
Saying to the prisoners: Come out!  
To those in darkness: Show yourselves!  
Along the ways they shall find pasture,  
on every bare height shall their pastures be.  
They shall not hunger or thirst,  
nor shall the scorching wind or the sun strike them;  
For he who pities them leads them  
and guides them beside springs of water.  
I will cut a road through all my mountains,  
and make my highways level.  
See, some shall come from afar,  
others from the north and the west,  
and some from the land of Syene.  
Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth,  
break forth into song, you mountains.  
For the Lord comforts his people  
and shows mercy to his afflicted.

The Word of the Lord.

**R. Thanks be to God.**

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the book of Lamentations: 3:17-26

*Hope in the Lord.*

My soul is deprived of peace,  
I have forgotten what happiness is;

I tell myself my future is lost,  
 all that I hoped for from the Lord.  
 The thought of my homeless poverty  
 is wormwood and gall;  
 Remembering it over and over  
 leaves my soul downcast within me.  
 But I will call this to mind,  
 as my reason to have hope:  
 The favors of the Lord are not exhausted,  
 his mercies are not spent;  
 They are renewed each morning,  
 so great is his faithfulness.  
 My portion is the Lord, says my soul;  
 therefore will I hope in him.  
 Good is the Lord to one who waits for him,  
 to the soul that seeks him;  
 It is good to hope in silence  
 for the saving help of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord.

**R. Thanks be to God.**

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans:

*In hope we were saved.*

8:18-27

Brothers and sisters:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing  
 compared with the glory to be revealed for us.

For creation awaits with eager expectation  
 the revelation of the children of God;  
 for creation was made subject to futility,  
 not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it,  
 in hope that creation itself  
 would be set free from slavery to corruption  
 and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know now that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now;  
 and not only that, but we ourselves,  
 who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,  
 we also groan within ourselves  
 as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

For in hope we were saved.  
Now hope that sees is not hope.  
For who hopes for what one sees?  
But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.  
In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness;  
    for we do not know how to pray as we ought,  
    but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.  
And the one who searches hearts  
    knows what is the intention of the Spirit,  
    because he intercedes for the holy ones  
    according to God's will.

The Word of the Lord.

**R. Thanks be to God.**

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the letter to the Hebrews:

5:7-9

*Christ intercedes for us.*

In the days when he was in the Flesh,  
    Christ offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears  
    to the one who was able to save him from death,  
    and he was heard because of his reverence.  
Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered;  
    and when he was made perfect,  
    he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

The Word of the Lord.

**R. Thanks be to God.**

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Matthew:

*You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever      11:25-30  
and have revealed them to children.*

At that time Jesus exclaimed:

    "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,  
    for although you have hidden these things  
    from the wise and the learned  
    you have revealed them to the little ones.  
Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.



All things have been handed over to me by my Father.

No one knows the Son except the Father,

and no one knows the Father except the Son

and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,

and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,

for I am meek and humble of heart;

and you will find rest for yourselves.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

**R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## APPENDIX III: LIFE CERTIFICATE REQUEST FORM

Please copy this page, fill out the information provided, and fax it to 404-920-8727, or mail it to Nicole Hartman, Office of Formation and Discipleship, Archdiocese of Atlanta, 2401 Lake Park Drive SE, Smyrna, GA 30308. This form can also be filled out online at [www.embracefamilies.com/life-certificates](http://www.embracefamilies.com/life-certificates).

Parents Names:

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Baby's Name:

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Address:

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Email:

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Home Parish:

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Each baby's name will be recorded in the *Book of Life*, which will be stored in the Chancery Offices of the Archdiocese, at the above address.

For more information, visit [www.embracefamilies.com](http://www.embracefamilies.com).

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