
THE PASTORAL CROSS



In Response to a Communal Loss

During one week several years ago, nearly a half-dozen young people died. How they died varied but all at once several parishes and schools were faced with the difficult task of dealing with the death of a young person. Some struggled to memorialize these young people in an appropriate way, others allowed youth to grieve while also celebrating the lives lost. Still others called in counselors to be present with the young people.

Today, those who serve young people in our parishes and schools may request one of the two diocesan Pastoral Crosses, constructed with these losses in mind. The cross is available to help young people deal with the death of one of their peers or the death of an adult who played a significant role in the lives of young people (e.g., a teacher, a coach, a youth ministry volunteer.).

For convenience, one cross is kept at CYM, the other is currently stored at Immaculate Conception parish in Marydel, MD.

In times of grief or crisis, most of us find consolation in doing some *activity*, something that ritualizes our feelings of sadness. The cross can be a powerful tool to help young people cope. It can help them focus on their loss and/or the disruption in their lives.

The simple act of placing one's prayers and notes in this beautifully crafted symbol of the Resurrection is a humbling reminder that all our healing and hope have Jesus as source.

Tips for Using the Cross

The Cross should not be requested to commemorate the anniversary of death, be used during an extended illness of a young person, or to hold vigil when someone is ill or injured (even seriously).

The top of the cross can be removed so that a scroll or individual messages can be placed inside. At an appropriate time, these may be shared with the family of the deceased.

It is necessary for the cross to be introduced to the community through a prayer service. Information on how to create a prayer service is provided in this handout.

Always read the notes and messages left within the cross, as the messages left inside may contain a cry for help. In addition some notes simply are not appropriate to pass along to a grieving family.

Guidelines For Use Of The Pastoral Cross

- One cross is kept at the CYM office. Another is kept in the southern region of our diocese. To request the Pastoral Cross in a time of loss or crisis, complete this form: <http://goo.gl/wGxHD9>. This allows us to keep a record of everywhere the cross is used. Please allow 24-48 hours for the CYM Office to respond and arrange delivery of the cross.
 - Make sure you have counselors on hand to assist young people in dealing with their loss.
 - The cross should be returned to CYM no later than one week after it arrives. It is suggested that the cross be removed at a natural break in activity, for example over the weekend at a school.
 - You should be prepared with index cards, colored paper, markers, pens, etc. to be used for the notes placed in the cross. While index cards work the best (they are easier to “grab” and remove from inside the cross), small pieces of paper, or post it notes that have been folded with the sticky side in will also work.
 - For large groups, consider using pieces of newspaper, for all to write their message on and place it (rolled or folded) in the cross. Another option would be to set up a prayer wall for youth to post notes upon and then collect and place them in the cross.
 - The cross and stand are designed as one unit. Do not use the cross separately and/or prop it up on/against any other object. This could cause damage to the cross and warp the base. Remember that you are responsible for making sure the cross is returned undamaged.
 - Writing on the cross, attaching things to the cross and any other actions that may alter the cross in anyway are strictly prohibited.
 - The use of the cross needs to be supervised to maintain its quality for future use by others. Cards and notes may be placed in and memorabilia may be placed around the cross but no changes may be made to the cross itself.
 - Always read the notes and messages left within the cross *especially after a suicide*. The messages left inside may contain a cry for help or the desire to join the deceased friend or loved one. In addition some notes simply are not appropriate to pass along to a grieving family.
 - Please complete the evaluation form and return it with the cross in order to report any problems with the Pastoral Cross immediately, as well as any improvements you would suggest.
 - Please share any stories about how your community used the cross and, if appropriate, any pictures. These will be useful as those new to ministry are introduced to this resource.
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Suggested Timeline

Upon Hearing The News

First. Compile information using the Pastoral Cross Agreement for Use form. Do this as soon as possible as you should allow 24-48 hours for CYM to respond to your request for the cross.

Second. Contact the family of the deceased to make sure they are in favor of using the Pastoral Cross. If there are extenuating circumstances around the death or if the family is intensely private, they may object to the cross' use. If so, consider one of the alternate ways of helping young people memorialize their grief.

Third. Contact CYM to request the Pastoral Cross in the event of the death of a young person or of an adult who held a significant place in the lives of the young people in a parish or school community (i.e., teacher, youth ministry volunteer, etc.). Use this link: <http://goo.gl/wGxHD9>.

Before Receiving the Cross

First. Use the resource *Dealing with the Death of a Young Person* (available from CYM website) and Prayer Service Preparation Checklist on page four of this document to prepare the Prayer Service that will introduce the Pastoral Cross to the parish or school community.

Second. Decide on the appropriate location to place the cross. We suggest: 1) Make the cross the focal point for quiet reflection space in a separate room at a wake, 2) Place it as a memorial in a school hallway, 3) As a center piece for a gathered youth night of prayer, or 4) Make the cross a focal point for a prayer service with teens and families at school or the parish.

While the Cross is in Use

First. Keep an eye on the cross ensuring that it is being used appropriately and that it is not becoming filled with notes to the family of the deceased.

Second. Collect and read through the notes left in the Pastoral Cross. If you are using the cross over a few days, read the notes daily.

Third. Return the cross to CYM office and complete the online evaluation. Send any stories or photos to CYM.

A Few Weeks Later

At an appropriate time, give the notes from the Cross to the family of the deceased. Again, make sure you have read them to make sure the notes are appropriate. While you may not see the harm in giving notes with obvious poor theology ("God must have wanted your daughter...") such notes may cause pain for the family of the deceased.



Preparing for the Prayer Service

1. Reserve parish/school space for prayer service
2. Find a proper place for the Pastoral Cross
3. Communicate the time and place of the prayer service to community
4. Contact bereavement professionals to help guide the process and to be present at service/events
5. Gather a team of students or adults to arrange hospitality before and after the service or youth night
6. Use or modify with suggestions from *Dealing with the Death of a Young Person* and keep in mind these planning items:
 - a. Invite students to submit prayers for the intercessions
 - b. Find students and/or adults who will facilitate the process of adding prayers/momentos to the cross
 - c. Gather readers and/or musicians and/or assemble recorded music and practice with sound system and lighting
 - d. Gather a team of students and adults to organize babysitting or provide children's area during the service (Note: this area could also serve as a space for 'relief' for other young people to relax and refocus)
 - e. Prepare index cards for those in attendance to use in submitting notes/prayers to deposit in the cross and consider using particular shapes or colors appropriate to commemorate the life/interests of the deceased
7. Gather writing utensils – pens, markers, simple art supplies
8. Make appropriate copies of the worship aid for those attending the prayer service

More resources are available on the CYM website. See this link:

<http://www.cdowcym.org/resources/view/category/pastoral-cross>

