

Funeral Arrangements

This document is intended for all losses after 20 weeks and those losses before 20 weeks where remains are intact.

Where to Begin...

First of all, be assured of our deepest sympathies on your recent loss. Nothing about this will be easy, and you are likely still processing. Planning how to say goodbye is very emotional, and it can sometimes feel confusing. The steps are laid out here to be as helpful as possible.

Making Arrangements...

For losses that occurred at 20 weeks gestation and later, ND state law applies. Legally, the next of kin (aka the parents) have the duty of burial under the same regulations as any death. This will mean some state paperwork and possibly a fee, and either the hospital or a funeral director can help make this a smooth and stress-free experience.

Before 20 weeks gestation, though not regulated by state law, it is important to note that you also have a legal right to bury your child if you so desire. If a hospital is holding the remains of a loss under 20 weeks, you have the legal option to allow the hospital to take care of disposal/burial. But please ask what their process is, since it is legal to dispose of fetal remains and tissue as medical waste and as Catholics we are obligated to bury our dead and reject this option of medical waste disposal. The CHI network in ND and the Sanford Bismarck hospital each respond to the human dignity of the remains and have yearly burials of fetal remains in caskets in local cemeteries. CHI St. Alexius in Bismarck holds a ceremony that parents are able to attend at the time of burial. Your hospital may do similarly; please ask your hospital what their process is to be sure they fulfill your Catholic responsibility. Alternately, parents can request the remains be released by the hospital to them or a funeral director for burial by the family. Such a burial is also possible if the remains were passed at home and are in the possession of the parents. It is worth noting that without preservation, remains kept at home will begin the process of decomposition, and placing the remains in a refrigerated environment can slow this process. A church funeral can be held for baptized and unbaptized children if the parents had intended baptism (per the Code of Canon Law, Canon 1183 §2 and our own diocesan law, 2nd Synod 178 §3).

In any circumstance, it is required to make burial in a designated cemetery because of state regulations about all human remains, regardless of age. This allows the body to be cared for forever ("in perpetuity" as all agreements with cemeteries are phrased). There may be exceptions for tribal lands; please contact your tribe for details.

Who Should Be Involved in the Arrangements?

Making funeral arrangements for your child may be overwhelming. Don't be afraid to let family members or friends make phone calls or schedule appointments for you. On the other hand, sometimes parents find healing in making these arrangements themselves.

A priest may be requested in the planning process. A funeral director may be involved in your planning, depending on the type of arrangements, and can be very helpful to you. Many funeral directors offer their services at a reduced rate for miscarriage and infant loss clients. Please note that funeral homes and cemeteries are separate, and you will need to meet with representatives of both.

What is the process?

Here is an outline of the steps you must now take:

Contact your parish priest.

Burial of body or cremated remains?

Select a cemetery.

Select a funeral home.

Contact the funeral home director.

Contact Your Parish Priest. The ministry of the priest is not restricted to funeral rites; he is also available to meet and pray with you and your family. He can help you understand the guidance of the Church in the burial and cremation decision, process, and details. He may be able to connect you to a network of Christian support in your time of need.

Burial of Body or Internment of Cremains? Both are legitimate means of fulfilling the work of mercy for your loved one, though burial is preferred; in the one, you bury the remains in a casket or vessel, and in the other you have the remains cremated and inter them in the ground or above ground in a cemetery/ mausoleum environment. Note that the Church in her wisdom requires that we do not scatter ashes, keep ashes at home, or integrate cremains into plants or jewelry/memorials. Oftentimes, financial and family situations and local availability affect the decision to cremate or not. Consultation with your priest can greatly assist you in your decision. Generally, burial is more expensive than cremation, and typically the costs associated with each must be paid at the time the arrangements are made.

Selecting a cemetery. The cemetery will be your child's final resting place, and where you go to visit. Some things to consider are its location (proximity to your home, proximity to buried relatives), the "feel" of the cemetery when you visit, the availability of a special section for miscarriage or infants, and cost. Some questions regarding cost might be: is a grave liner or specific type of vault required in addition to a casket? Are there different guidelines for miscarriages/infant loss? What fees are associated with opening and closing the burial site? Is perpetual care included in the price? What is the cost of a marker? Can an outside provider be used? What are the requirements of the marker? Are there rules about what is placed (flowers, etc.) at the gravesite?

Selecting a funeral home. The director of the funeral home you select will be involved in any of the decisions you make. Be sure to choose a home that will listen to your requests and work to make them a reality. Some questions to ask a funeral home: What type of transportation does the funeral home provide? How much parking space is available? What kind of "extras" does the funeral home provide? Will the funeral home help you work with your parish to arrange a Funeral Mass? If this is not part of their services, you will need to call the parish and begin these arrangements early in the process.

What about the cost?

Please know that most funeral homes will accept outside caskets. The Trappists provide free infant caskets at trappistcaskets.com. Earlier losses will find burial vessels to be more appropriate to their needed size; Elizabeth Ministry International offers miscarriage burial vessels for \$20-50 on their web store, or sometimes a handmade or purchased box can be appropriate to this task. Consult with your funeral director for funeral home and cemetery regulations and recommendations.

- Some funeral homes are able to offer low-cost options for the burial of stillborn or infant losses. All involved understand that parents do not anticipate this heavy cross.
 - In Bismarck, Eastgate/Parkway Funeral Home assists in the burial of stillborn or infant losses at little to no cost for their services. They can be found at 701-223-7322 and <https://www.eastgatefuneral.com/> .
 - In Dickinson, Stevenson Funeral Home assisted with Maximillian Pio's burial, after whom Max's Mission is named. They also offer their services at little to no cost for these little ones. They can be found at 701-483-7900 and <https://stevensonfuneralhome.com/> .
 - In Minot, Thompson-Larson Funeral Home assists in the burial of stillborn or infant losses at little to no cost. They can be found at 701-852-3446 and <https://www.thompsonlarson.com/> .
 - In Washburn/Underwood/Turtle Lake, Goetz Funeral Home assists in the burial of stillborn or infant losses at little to no cost. They can be found at 701-462-3666 and <https://www.goetzfuneralhomes.com/> .
 - In Williston, Everson-Coughlin Funeral Home assists in the burial of stillborn or infant losses at little to no cost. They can be found at 701-577-3738 and <http://www.eversoncoughlin.com/> .
- The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in [La Crosse, Wisconsin](#), is dedicated to the remembrance of children lost in utero and shortly after birth. Burial is possible here, as is a range of remembrance options without burial. All options aim to be cost-effective for grieving families.
- The Securing End-of-Life Expenses ([SEOLE](#)) program of Angelnames.org/programs, provides needy families assistance with autopsy, funeral, burial and cremation expenses. If approved, funding is sent to the service provider. Families complete a brief form indicating their needs.
- Rest in His Arms Angel Gowns, a non-profit active on [Facebook](#), provides free and beautiful burial gowns, pouches, and sacks made by volunteers from donated wedding dresses. Their gowns are distributed to hospitals, funeral homes and individual families all across the USA free of charge as their gift of love to help those grieving the loss of a baby.
- The TEARS Foundation (thetearsfoundation.org/services) pays the funeral home and/or cemetery directly and there must be an outstanding balance in order to receive assistance. They ask that you exhaust other options which may be available to you prior to applying for this financial assistance. One of their programs, Jesse's Grant, may provide a flat, granite grave marker if it has been 6 months or more since baby's passing. They are currently accepting applications for North Dakota (Western Region).