

The Pastoral Cross

Those who are called to lead young people in our parishes and schools may request to use of the Diocesan Pastoral Cross 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 (i.e., teacher, youth ministry volunteer, etc.).

Dealing with a Death Within the Community of Young People

In times of grief or crisis, most of us find consolation in *doing some activity*, something that ritualizes our feelings of sadness. The Pastoral 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. Of course, the act of placing one's prayers and notes in this beautifully crafted symbol of the Resurrection is a humbling reminder that Jesus is our source for all our healing and hope.

All communities will encounter grief and as adult leaders in ministry, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to assist our young people in working through feelings of anger, disbelief and sadness. Still, it is important to remember that not all deaths affect young people (and therefore your parish or school community) in the same way. Some hit closer to home and some only affect the young people peripherally.

Use of the Pastoral Cross is reserved for the death of a young person or the death of an adult who plays a significant role in the lives of young people. The Pastoral Cross is not intended for use to commemorate the anniversary of death, be used during an extended illness of a young person, or to hold vigil when someone is injured (even seriously). Put more simply, the Diocesan Pastoral Cross is reserved for use in a faith community for those sad times when a young person or adult who is active in that community can no longer be physically present. They are rare exceptions.

Within the Faith Community and the Community of Young People

On the occasion when the death is a young person within the faith community of a parish or school or when the death is an adult who played an important role in the lives of your young people within the community of faith it is appropriate, even encouraged, to use the Diocesan Pastoral Cross. This may include a teacher at the parish school, a coach, a youth ministry volunteer, or a catechist in the religious education program. These deaths directly affect the young people in your community of faith. In such cases, CYM suggests the following response:

- Use of the Pastoral Cross (introduced through a Prayer Service)
- Use the resource *Dealing with the Death of a Young Person*
- Host a gathering for the young people to come together, tell stories and share their grief
- Invite a Grief Counselor to join your young people to assist them in processing

Within the Faith Community but Outside the Community of Young People

There will also be occasions when there is a death of a young person who is familiar to the young people of your parish through a school or neighborhood community but is

not a member of what you consider the community of young people to whom you directly minister (youth ministry, religious education, school community). In this instance, young people may not know the teen personally, but mourn alongside friends who did. Another example of such a loss would be the death of a parent of one of the young people in your parish community who was not serving in one of the capacities mentioned above.

While all death brings sadness, it would be inappropriate to use the Diocesan Pastoral Cross at such a time since the cross is brought into a community *in place of* one of its immediate members.

To deal with deaths that have a more indirect affect on the faith community, CYM offers the following suggestions:

- Host a gathering for the young people to express their sadness, share stories and comfort one another
- Create a Prayer Wall where young people can write their message, their thoughts and their feelings around the death
- Have young people write down their thoughts, feelings or messages on pieces of paper and link them together to make a prayer chain that can be hung in the space where your young people gather
- Host a short prayer service

Outside the Local Faith Community

Whenever there is a tragic event within our larger communities, the effects can be experienced by many. We need to assist young people in processing their feelings when someone they do not know but who is similar in age, is from the area, etc. passes away. For example, if there is a car accident and one of the victims is a student from an area public school, young people from your parish may not know the family but still feel a sense of loss. Young people will feel vulnerable and may wish to discuss the circumstances surrounding the loss.

Such deaths indirectly affect the young people in your parish or school. The loss of a young person from another community is sad, but is not a loss for the immediate community to whom you minister. As such, it would be inappropriate to use the Diocesan Pastoral Cross at such a time since the cross is brought into a community *in place of* one of its immediate members.

To deal with deaths that affect on the faith community on a larger scale, CYM offers the following suggestions:

- Create a general awareness of the death among your adult leaders so they may be on the lookout for behaviors or conversations indicating the need for a more specific response
- Make mention of the loss at a regularly scheduled event

- Have a Prayer Wall where young people can write their message, their thoughts and their feelings around the death
- Include the names in opening and closing prayers

Suggested Timeline for Using the Pastoral Cross

Upon Hearing The News

First. Compile information using the Pastoral Cross Agreement for Use (Form J in Appendix Four of *Empowering Disciples*). 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 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 the CYM to request the Pastoral Cross. Use the Agreement for Use Form to ensure that you have all of the necessary information prior to calling CYM (Form J in Appendix Four of *Empowering Disciples*).

Before Receiving the Cross

First. Use the resource *Dealing with the Death of a Young Person* (found in Section Three of the diocesan FSGC Guidelines) and Prayer Service Preparation Checklist in Appendix Two of *Empowering Disciples* to prepare the Prayer Service that will introduce the Pastoral Cross to the parish or school community.

Second. Decide upon the appropriate location to place the cross. Make the cross the focal point for quiet reflection space in a separate room at a wake or place it as a memorial in a school hallway or as a center piece for a parish youth group night of prayer or even 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.

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 with evaluation.

A Few Weeks Later

At an appropriate time, give the notes from the Pastoral 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.