

The Pastoral Cross

In Response to a Communal Loss

Background

The task of dealing with the death of a young person or community member is always a challenging one. It can be difficult to memorialize those who are lost while still celebrating their lives and blessings to the community. Often, young people may find it helpful to seek grief counseling during their sadness.

Today, those who serve young people in our parishes and schools may request the Diocesan Pastoral Cross, 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 their lives (e.g., a pastor, teacher, coach, youth ministry volunteer).



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 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 the source.

Guidelines for Use of the Pastoral Cross

- There is one Pastoral Cross for the Diocese; the CYM Office can provide the Cross on a first-come-first-serve basis. To request the Pastoral Cross in a time of loss or crisis, please email catholicyouth@cdow.org or call 302-658-3800. 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 in a timely manner, while remaining sensitive to the community's processing of grief. It is suggested that the cross be removed at a natural break in activity, such as over a weekend at a school.
- Prepare index cards, colored paper, markers, pens, etc., for notes placed in the cross. Index cards work best, but small folded pieces of paper or sticky notes may also be used.

- For large groups, consider using large notepads or poster paper for all to write messages to be rolled up and placed in the cross. Another option is to set up a prayer wall for youth to post notes, which can later be collected and placed inside.
- The cross and stand are designed as one unit. Do not use the cross separately or prop it up against another object. This could cause damage to the cross and warp the base. You are responsible for returning the cross undamaged.
- Writing on, attaching things to, or altering the cross in any way is strictly prohibited.
- Supervise use of the cross to maintain its quality. Cards and memorabilia may be placed around the cross but not attached to it.
- **Always read the notes and messages left within the cross, especially after a suicide or tragic death. Some messages may contain a cry for help or be inappropriate for sharing.**
- Please share any stories or pictures of how your community used the cross with the CYM Office. These can help introduce this resource to others.

Tips for Using the Cross

- 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 highly recommended that 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. Some notes may not be appropriate to pass along to a grieving family.**

Suggested Timeline

Upon Hearing the News

- Compile information using the Pastoral Cross Agreement for Use form, located on the CYM Website here: <https://cdowcym.org/pastoral-cross/>, or email catholicyouth@cdow.org. Allow 24–48 hours for CYM to respond to your request.
- Contact the family of the deceased to make sure they approve of using the Pastoral Cross. If they object, consider alternate ways of memorializing.

Before Receiving the Cross

1. Use the resource 'Dealing with the Death of a Young Person' (available from CYM website) and the Prayer Service Preparation Checklist in this document to prepare the prayer service.
2. Decide on the appropriate location for the cross, such as:

- Quiet reflection space in a separate room at a wake.
- Memorial in a school hallway.
- Centerpiece for a youth night of prayer.
- Focal point for a prayer service with teens and families at school or parish.

While the Cross is in Use

1. Ensure the cross is used and cared for appropriately.
2. Collect and review notes daily if the cross is used over multiple days.
3. Return the cross to the CYM office and send any stories or photos to CYM.

A Few Weeks Later

Once the time is right, give the notes from the Cross to the family of the deceased. Be sure to review them beforehand to ensure they are appropriate. Notes with poor theology, insensitive messages, or other inappropriate remarks may unintentionally cause pain.

Preparing for the Prayer Service

Checklist:

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 the community.
4. If able, contact counselors or bereavement professionals to help guide the process and be present at certain events.
5. Gather a team of students or adults to arrange hospitality before and after the service or youth night.
6. Use or modify resources such as 'Dealing with the Death of a Young Person.' Keep in mind:
 - Invite students to submit prayers for the intercessions.
 - Find students/adults to facilitate the process of adding prayers or momentos to the cross.
 - Gather readers, musicians, or recorded music and test sound/lighting.
 - Prepare index cards or shaped/colorful paper for notes to deposit in the cross, reflecting the deceased's life/interests.
7. Gather writing utensils – pens, markers, simple art supplies.
8. Make copies of the worship aid for attendees.

More resources are available on the CYM website:

<https://cdowcym.org/pastoral-cross/>