

Our Ministry of Consolation

Kathy Kuczka

Among the most popular events in my hometown are funerals—or so it seemed while growing up. Whenever my mother informed me that someone had died, she would ask if I were going to the funeral, to which I would reply, “I didn’t know her.” My mother would then assert, “Well, she knew you.”

My mother and others in our city not only attended the funerals of those they knew well, but they also attended the funerals of those whom they barely knew. I didn’t think much of it at the time. I just figured they liked going to funerals. What I later realized was that they were responding to their baptismal call to comfort those who mourn.

As the *Order of Christian Funerals* states, the ministry of consolation rests with the entire community of believers.

When a member of Christ’s Body dies, the faithful are called to a ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. Christian consolation is rooted in that hope that comes from faith in the saving death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church calls each member of Christ’s Body—priest, deacon, layperson—to participate in the ministry of consolation care for the dying, to pray for the dead and to comfort those who mourn. (*Order of Christian Funerals* [OCF], 8)

The people of God console those who have experienced a loss by extending words of comfort and by supporting them with acts of kindness such as delivering meals or offering transportation for out-of-town guests.

Perhaps the greatest gift that can be given at a time of grief is the gift of presence. The presence of the community, especially at the funeral liturgies, is a symbol of hope in the resurrection of the dead that can strengthen the faith of those whose faith may be shaken by loss.

The community’s principal involvement in the ministry of consolation is expressed in its active participation in the celebration of the funeral rites, particularly the vigil for the deceased, the funeral liturgy, and the rite of commitment. For this reason these rites should be scheduled at times that permit as many of the community as possible to be present. (OCF, 11)



With words of comfort and acts of kindness, the people of God console those who have experienced loss.

Parishioners offer solace to the grieving in a variety of ways. Consider the following:

- Volunteer with the parish to notify other parishioners of a coming funeral.
- Participate in the funeral liturgies.
- Even if unable to participate in the funeral liturgies, pray for the deceased and their loved ones.
- Join the choir that provides music for the funeral liturgy.
- Become part of a ministry of volunteers that provide a luncheon after the liturgy. Arranging such a reception eases the family’s burden and creates a time and a place where they can enjoy the support of friends and other loved ones. These receptions also help build up the parish community.
- Find out if the parish offers a bereavement ministry, and offer to be trained for the ministry.

Death is never easy, but a community that provides care and compassion at a time of loss eases the pain and makes manifest the promise of Jesus in the beatitudes, “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

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