

Detailed MC Notes for A Memorial Service for Aborted Children

These were the notes used when this event was piloted at a Catholic church in BC in June 2016; this can be adapted for churches of various denominations.

Opening Remarks

Good evening and welcome to our memorial. Tonight we gather to remember the almost 4 million pre-born children who lost their lives to abortion. We gather to honor and acknowledge them, and grieve their absence from our world.

Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis has repeatedly observed that we must “learn how to weep.”

During his visit to the Philippines when asked by a 12-year-old, who had suffered great poverty and abuse, why God allows innocent children to suffer, he said, “Let us learn how to weep.”

In 2013, when he visited Lampedusa, a small island off the coast of Italy where migrants often travel there by sea from Africa, many of them losing their lives during the rough journey, he said,

“Who among us has wept for these things and things like this? Who has wept for the deaths of these brothers and sisters? Who has wept for the mothers carrying their babies? ... We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of suffering with.”

It has been said, “Tears are words the heart can’t express.”

Yet who has shed tears for the millions of children who have lost their lives? And the millions upon millions of us who are born, who live with the pain of this reality?

Tonight we may weep, which is acknowledging someone valuable, unrepeatable, and irreplaceable is missing from our world. Tonight we also have hope—hope that our God of mercy redeems all things and, as we’re told in Revelation, “makes all things new.”

Unlike most funerals where the body of the beloved who will be laid to rest is present, we do not have the bodies of aborted children to honor in that way. We are nonetheless people of hope, trusting that through God’s mercy, these children are very much alive in Heaven, being cared for by their Heavenly Father. During the opening song, two young children will lay flowers at the front to help us think of the millions of children lost to abortion, not as being dead, but as being very much alive in Christ.

Please stand for our opening song, Come to the Water.

Opening Prayer

[The priest reads this, or says as inspired in the moment. At the end of his prayer he asks people to be seated.]

Scripture Reading

Luke 7:36—8:3 [The priest asks everyone to stand for the reading of the Gospel and at the end asks them to be seated. People remain seated through the next songs, sermon, and testimony]

Elizabeth Sutcliffe Intro

Now I'd like to call up Elizabeth Sutcliffe. Elizabeth is the Coordinator of Client Services at Hope for Women Pregnancy Services. She currently presents in schools, universities, churches and various groups, clubs and organizations. Elizabeth is also active with the Silent No More Awareness Campaign through whom she is sharing her testimony tonight. She resides in Abbotsford with her husband and two children.

Candle Lighting and Reflection Time

At this point in the service, we wanted to provide an opportunity for personal prayer and private reflection.

We have lined the front of the church with tea light candles. And over the duration of the next two songs, we welcome you to come up and light a candle or several. Perhaps you will be lighting for the children in general, or perhaps you are remembering a child specifically. I know for me, tonight I am recalling the time a medical student called me because her classmate was unexpectedly pregnant and wanting an abortion. The girl who called, and I, tried to change the other student's mind, but unfortunately she had the abortion. Tonight, I am lighting my candle in remembrance of that child.

[Side note *not* to be read out: By the MC telling who she/he is lighting for, and it *not* being a child he/she was involved in killing through abortion, sets a tone for everyone: all attendees should thus have someone they can light for even if they haven't been directly involved with abortion; moreover, a post-abortive person might feel more anonymous coming forward to light a candle because people won't necessarily assume they've had an abortion but instead might think they are remembering someone else's aborted child. We arranged for a few people to light candles first, to get a momentum going, but it ended up being unnecessary because people *flocked* to the front to light candles.]

Moreover, we have distributed pens, pencils, and papers throughout the pews. Each Sunday, this petition box is placed at the foot of the altar for masses. Perhaps you'd want to take the next several minutes to write a letter to a loved one lost to abortion, or write a petition and then at the end of the service, you can place it in this box which is at the back of the pews on a small table. The contents of the petitions and letters will not be read by others, so you can be assured of confidentiality.

Closing Remarks

As our service comes to a close, I wish to thank all of you for coming out, as well as to thank those who helped make this event possible, who are named in your program. In particular, I want to thank Hannah Van Nort, who isn't listed but who graciously filled in last minute for Jesse LeBlanc who was unable to do music with Kathleen.

So where do we go from here?

It is common after services like this that a variety of thoughts or feelings are brought up and/or that there is a desire to connect with others. We have found that having trained, trusted, and reliable people available provides various benefits for the well being of individuals and the community. These benefits include:

- receiving spiritual and emotional encouragement for oneself, or to help support other people in one's life.
- having a safe, non-judgmental place for parts of our stories to be shared
- an opportunity to process overwhelming emotions that might have been triggered, in a safe and private setting before going home
- praying with someone who understands and does not judge
- potentially talking about steps one can take towards healing beyond this evening

So on that note, I'd like to ask Stephen Ching, Sarah Ruggier, and Anna Loch to please stand. Stephen, Sarah, and Anna all have counselling experience, with Stephen and Sarah running their own counselling practises. They are present here tonight to be available for all of us, should we wish to individually speak with one of them before going home. They are wearing name tags and will be at the reception in the church hall. If you wish to speak with them, please feel free to approach them where you can either speak at the reception or the small chapel next to the reception room.

Thank you Stephen, Sarah, and Anna.

Of course, also feel free to speak with Elizabeth or Fr. Matthew. Fr. Mark is going to stay behind in the church in the confessional by the front entrance should anyone wish to use the Sacrament.

Beyond this evening, if you have felt a stirring in your heart to seek deeper healing regarding the loss pre-born children in your life due to abortion, Rachel's Vineyard is a post-abortion retreat program run by our archdiocese and their website is in the programs. Below that is Elizabeth Sutcliffe's post-abortion healing website as well.

Then, if you've felt a stirring in your heart to do more for the pre-born to spare future children from abortion, there is a listing in your program of various pro-life organizations within the Lower Mainland.

We welcome your feedback about tonight, so please consider sending us a message (my e-mail is in the program) about your thoughts.

Finally, the St. Pat's World Youth Day pilgrims and their families have generously prepared coffee, tea, and sweets at a reception for all of us—please do come over. As you exit the church, walk left, past the priest's house and toward the parking lot of the school. You will see the door to the parish hall.

Please stand for Father's closing prayer to be followed by our closing song.

[The priest then says a closing prayer and musicians begin How Great Thou Art.]