

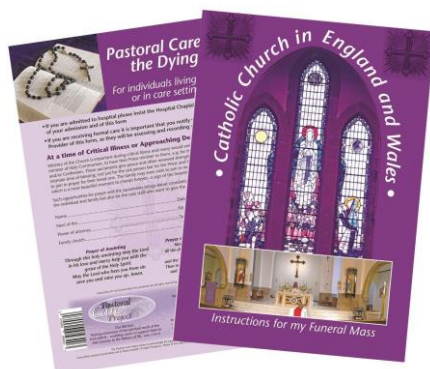
## ‘The God who journeys with us’

“Many children and young people will never see their parents receive the sacraments.”

These words are challenging, and have caused us at the Pastoral Care Project to reflect on our work with families especially where the frail elderly are isolated and often feel neglected. There is the good news hearing a young child reading her own prayer during school assembly and asking God to take care of her grandmother who has dementia, to help her because she is her grandmother - a profound prayer. There is the elderly carer who has become so exhausted that she can no longer go to mass or obtain sufficient help to care for her dying husband.

The growing number of elderly people in our communities and the desire to help others has inspired many parishes to set up pastoral awareness events and to provide Instructions for my Funeral Mass for their parishioners. This document produced by the Pastoral Care Project has the approval of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and is being widely used, and not just by the elderly, but those concerned for their funeral mass arrangements.

Bishop David McGough Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham and lead bishop to the Pastoral Care Project said **“The ‘Instructions for my Funeral Mass’ is another valuable contribution from the Pastoral Care Project. Bereavement is always painful, and this document, expressing clear wishes for the conduct of a funeral, is one of the many ways of easing that pain. I recommend its adoption in all parishes. At a time of great stress it provides a clear pathway for all involved; family, clergy and funeral directors. Please do not hesitate to contact the Pastoral Care Project for supplies of the document and make it available at the back of your Church.”** Bishop David McGough’s full message can be read in the Pastoral Care Project’s latest Annual Report [www.pastoralcareproject.org.uk](http://www.pastoralcareproject.org.uk)



Included in Instructions for my Funeral Mass is a section dedicated to ‘Critical Illness and Care of the Dying’. It is important for individuals or power of attorney to ensure that the faith tradition, the sacraments and care of the dying are noted when a person is being assessed for formal care or care at home. It will be of assistance to the elderly person who may be moved into a care home and unable to access the sacraments themselves or express their dying wishes.

It is not easy to talk about dying, but the person who is experiencing a loved one dying does need support, as do their children and grand children. The person dying may be the main carer of someone who is very frail and if they are suffering

with dementia there are an additional concerns - what happens to them; how are they helped to grieve?

The experience of the Pastoral Care Project since 1994 has been that where provision was made for the person with dementia to take part in the funeral mass they seemed to have an understanding and acceptance. Whilst they felt sorrow as all mourners do, they were comforted being close to God in the mass. Those who did not take part in the mass struggled to find peace; often asking when will their loved one be coming home as their last memory was that of seeing them ill in hospital.

People with dementia have their own memories and being mindful of them and just how difficult and painful it is for them coping with the death of their spouse; a son or daughter or the memory of a parents death is important.

Frances Molloy Project Manager **says “I recall many visits to one elderly man in a care home. He had no family. He would from time to time, especially during the winter months when he felt low talk about dying. He talked in great detail about his mother and father and the way in which they died. This seemed to give him comfort and strength - renewing his hope that God would be close to him in his hour death.”**

In their concern several parish priests have told us that they have held a parish event to presented Instructions for my Funeral Mass document and encouraged parishioners to use it for their own person use which would also help the priests. The parish priests also encouraged parishioners to visit those who may be vulnerable; to listen and to assist the person to complete the document. Some parishes regularly include such information in their weekly newsletter making it is easier for the subject to be approached by parish visitors or the Eucharistic Minister.



The document has already proved to be a practical way to reach out to others - a way to evangelise and help engage with families who may not be church going or those who may have no previous experience of organising a family funeral.

The Pastoral Care Project wishes to thank all those who parishes and care homes have already purchased Instructions for my Funeral Mass and helped with this apostolate. Through purchasing the documents they are helping the Projects' charitable work.

Parishes, car homes and funeral directors can download an order form, poster and resources by visiting the website [www.pastoralcareproject.org.uk](http://www.pastoralcareproject.org.uk) Email [info@pastoralcareproject.org.uk](mailto:info@pastoralcareproject.org.uk) or write to Frances Molloy, Project Manager, Pastoral Care Project, St George's House, Gerards Way, Coleshill B46 3FG

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