



The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Catholic Funeral Rituals and Practices on the island of Ireland: A Pilot Study.

INTERVIEW PHASE

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Purpose of the Pilot Study. We are academics working in the Centre for Mission and Ministries at the Pontifical University, St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

The study is concerned with exploring the experience of Catholic funerals during the Covid-19 pandemic, from the perspective of funeral directors, ministers, and people in local faith communities.

What will the Interview Phase of the Pilot Study involve? The study will involve interviewing funeral directors, ordained, lay, and religious ministers, and other people in local faith communities, in order to: (1) identify specific personal and communal habits and activities in accompanying dying, deceased, and bereaved persons, in participants' localities, during the pandemic, (2) understand the lived experience of offering bereavement support for those in formal positions of responsibility and informally as 'neighbours', and (3) learn how the pandemic impacted Catholic funeral from participants' perspectives. Interviews for those holding formal positions of responsibility – funeral directors, ordained, religious and lay ministers – will include questions specific to their areas of responsibility around Catholic funerals.

Each participant will be asked to participate in a one-hour (approximately) remote, semi-structured, recorded interview. Interviews will be hosted on Microsoft Teams or Zoom and will be simultaneously recorded using audio-only recording software such as Audacity.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, of the Faculty of Theology, Pontifical University, St Patrick's College Maynooth. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part? The research team identified your local community as offering a distinct example of funeral rituals and practices during the pandemic. You have been invited to participate because you have a valuable perspective to offer that will help us to better understand what is happening in your local community. Or you have been recommended by other participants as someone qualified and experienced in this area.

Do you have to take part? No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, we hope that you will agree to take part and give us some of your time to

participate in a remote interview. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the Information Sheet for your own records.

If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are published.

What information will be collected?

These interviews will seek to gather information on:

- What was distinctive about the funeral rituals and practices in your local community during the pandemic;
- What you think is the purpose and meaning of those rituals and practices;
- What your lived experience was of accompanying dying, deceased, and bereaved persons during the pandemic;
- what the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been.

In you are in a formal position of responsibility, the interviews will also ask:

- what you understand by the purpose of your role or part in funeral activities;
- what specific challenges are involved;
- what is the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on bereavement and funeral care.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. Neither participants nor their local faith communities will be identifiable.

In order to protect the anonymity of all participants, data gathered in the interviews will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used in the presentation of findings. The study will not use any data or disclose any details that might make either the participant or their faith communities identifiable.

All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on Maynooth University (MU) computers or servers and will be accessed only by researchers on the project: Michael Shortall (Moral Theology department) or Aoife McGrath (Pastoral Theology department), or a research assistant who will be trained to assist in data collection.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at the Pontifical University, St Patrick's College Maynooth in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed (by Michael Shortall and Aoife McGrath).

Manual data will be shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten.

What will happen to the results? The outputs of the project will be published in submissions to academic conferences, peer-reviewed academic journals, and pastoral journals, as appropriate. Some papers may focus on an aspect of the research. Shorter summary pieces for electronic formats such as RTE Brainstorm or media may also be produced. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part? We don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. However, given the sensitivity of the research area, and the potential that you may have been recently bereaved, there is a risk for you to experience some emotional discomfort. Researchers will give you the option to skip questions you anticipate will be uncomfortable. If you experience emotional discomfort, researchers will pause recording, remain 'present' with you, if you wish them to do so, and give you an opportunity to collect yourself. The researcher will discontinue the interview at any time if you so wish.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the interview we will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling.

If you feel you need support following your participation in this research project:

- Contact the [Irish Hospice Foundation](#) - a charity providing support and information on dying, death and bereavement.
- Contact the [Bethany Bereavement Support Group](#) – a voluntary community and parish based service providing bereavement support for adults.
- Contact [Turas Le Cheile Bereavement Support Services](#) a voluntary service operating from Naas, Clane, Kilcock and Leixlip.

If during your participation you feel the information and guidelines provided were neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact Dr Suzanne Mulligan, from the Pontifical University Research Ethics Committee, at research.ethics@spcm.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact any member of the research team:

Dr Michael Shortall, Registrar:

michael.shortall@spcm.ie

Dr Aoife McGrath, Director of Pastoral Theology:

aoife.mcgrath@spcm.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.