



ITALY

## THE UNBORN

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Placing the coffins in the hearse. For these ceremonies the undertakers offer their services for free once a month.

**It is actually possible to hold funerals for fetuses. And anti-abortion organisations are doing just that, often without the knowledge of the parents.**

- ▶ Within 24 hours of an abortion or miscarriage, it is possible to ask the health authority for permission to bury the body.
- ▶ Often the parents are not informed, so catholic associations perform such burials.
- ▶ The fetuses that have not been requested, once the 24 hours have passed, are otherwise disposed of together with used medical waste.
- ▶ More than 76 thousand abortions were performed In Italy in 2018.
- ▶ Collective funerals occur away from the gaze of most: early in the morning the fetuses are transported in small boxes.

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Inside the cemetery chapel, the deacon holds a mass for the unborn.





The municipal cemetery in Cesena. A burial takes place.





Lara, a mother who has chosen to bury her foetus after a miscarriage in the 16th week of pregnancy.





A cemetery employee carries a coffin containing 12 fetuses for a “cumulative” mass burial.

Early in the morning Italian cemeteries are desolate places. Funerals are not usually held at dawn but today an exception is being made: people enter in silence, holding to their chests white boxes that, after a quick prayer, are laid sideways in a specially dug grave. The coffins are covered with fresh earth and a cross is laid to indicate the site. There are no names written on those crosses, only hospital codes that relate to surgical operations, usually abortions. This is a grave for fetuses that were never born.

It happens at least once a month, in many parts of Italy. Private ceremonies, few indiscrete eyes and almost never those of the parents: burying these tiny remains, which are stored until that moment in the hospital morgue, are volunteers from catholic anti-abortion associations. The Italian law on abortion, n.194 of 1978, states that the parents, within 24 hours of the operation, are entitled to request from the local health authority that the foetus is buried. This is just a very short time window and parents are often not even aware of this possibility. Once the 24 hours have passed, the organic material becomes the property of the local health authority that must see to its disposal, or in some cases, pass it on to associations with which the hospital has special agreements, also without the consent of the parents.

This is possible because of gaps in the law governing the interruption of pregnancies (in 2018 in Italy more than 76 thousand abortions took place), which are enabling a practice that is completely unknown to most. This practice, in fact, involves a different treatment for some of those fetuses (aborted prior to the 22nd week of gestation) otherwise destined for the incinerator together with medical waste and non-recognizable anatomical matter. "With this act we entrust your child in to the arms of the loving Lord and Father," reads the form for the request for burial, "to honour them and give them the mercy that they deserve."

*(The captions for the photos don't give the precise locations out of respect for the request for confidentiality made by the associations involved)*





Once a month Grazia, a volunteer from a catholic association, prepares the foetuses, taking them from the hospital, placing them in the coffins and transporting them to the cemetery.





The morgue. On a bench sit two boxes containing fetuses ahead of being transported to the cemetery for the funeral ceremony.





The morgue. Volunteers from catholic associations prepare for the burial ceremony.



A fetus at 17 weeks following a miscarriage. At this gestational age, unless alternative arrangements have been made, usually the foetus is classed as special hospital waste and is incinerated.





A small coffin in a grave during a funeral service at the council cemetery.





A deacon stands at the entrance to the almost deserted cemetery. The funerals for the unborn usually take place early in the morning, in the presence of very few people, usually only the members of the religious associations involved.





Elena suffered a miscarriage during the 17th week of pregnancy. She had already given her baby the name Francesco. The burial helped her to mourn her loss that she experienced as a genuine bereavement, one that she says society rarely acknowledges.



A deacon and some volunteers leave the chapel after the religious service, carrying the coffins for the burial.





The mortuary. Boxes containing foetuses are placed on a bench ahead of being transported to the cemetery.



Cesena. A detail of grave number 16, marking the site of the first burial to take place in this cemetery.





A volunteer from a catholic association during the funeral ceremony in the cemetery chapel.



A mother cries after having just handed over the small coffin containing her foetus to the cemetery staff. In this cemetery the remains of the unborn are kept in an underground chamber accessible only to cemetery staff through a narrow opening.





The morgue. A deacon blesses the coffins; the differing sizes of the boxes are due to the different gestation ages of the fetuses contained in them.



Anti-abortion campaigners join together in prayer in front of a hospital on the day that abortions are scheduled to take place.





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