

*Pregnancy &
Early Infant Loss*

A Handbook for Parents



Parents' Prayer

*Dear Lord,
We are saddened and hurt
and grieve the loss of our child.
We miss being able to hold and caress our child.
We will miss sharing the many experiences
with our child that
life on earth would have presented.
We do not understand and yet we know
that our child is also your child.
Increase our understanding and
strengthen our trust in you. We are
comforted by your infinite love and
mercy and we are confident that
our child is now home and in your
loving embrace. Please further
comfort us. Use our suffering to
fulfill your will. Grant us peace.
Strengthen our hope such that we
can see past our tears and look
forward with joy to that time when
we will also be able to embrace our
child and share the eternal joy which
our child is now experiencing with you.*

Jesus, I trust in You.

We are so sorry for your loss...

Losing a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant loss can be one of the most difficult experiences that you will ever endure. *We are truly sorry for your loss.*

Pregnancy and early infant loss typically involves a great amount of shock and grief as these losses are usually sudden and unexpected. Typically, there is little to no time to anticipate grief or prepare for the loss of your child. The grieving process of parents bereaved by pregnancy or early infant loss is especially unique.

If your loss took place at an early stage of pregnancy, there is often no funeral, and your child's loss may remain unacknowledged by family and friends. Not having a formal chance to say goodbye may also complicate the grieving process and hinder support systems that are usually inherent during the death of a loved one.

Society has often minimized or ignored the loss and grief that families have experienced through pregnancy and early infant loss. In the past, mothers and fathers were often expected to move past the experience and little attention was focused on the fact that they lost their child. Advances in medical technology, particularly sonograms, are helping to increase awareness of the unborn child as we can readily see the humanity of the unborn child even at early stages of pregnancy. Cultural attitudes are now moving towards greater recognition of pregnancy and infant losses.

Losing a baby can be a very private experience for a couple. As pregnancy and early infant loss is a deeply personal journey, many do not feel comfortable talking about their loss. Most parents acknowledge that they have been hurt by negative comments from others when they do share their story. This painful time can greatly be impacted, both positively and negatively, by the community around you. Isolation within marriages, family members, and friendships is common during a time of loss. If you are unable to get the support that you need from loved ones, it may be beneficial to reach out to a priest, deacon, therapist or support group.

Be patient with yourself during this time. There is no set schedule of grieving and your grief, emotions and healing may look different than others, even your spouse. It is important to remember that grieving is a normal part of the bereavement process and includes a shifting of emotions from denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Since men and women grieve differently (especially in the case of pregnancy and early infant loss, as the mother experienced the physical development and loss of the baby within her womb) this is not only a vulnerable time for you individually, but also as a couple.

When a woman's body goes from being pregnant to not pregnant, there is a natural shift of hormones that affects brain chemistry. Postpartum depression can settle in after losing a baby without a mother even recognizing it. It is normal that those who experience pregnancy and early infant loss develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as there are many unexpected life situations that may trigger anger, sadness, and jealousy. Seeing other pregnant women and couples having healthy babies are among the more obvious triggers.

Although not always possible, it may be helpful to anticipate times that may be particularly difficult for you, such as birthdays, due dates, certain holidays, baby showers, etc. You may not feel comfortable participating in these events in the same ways that you once did and recognize that that is ok and a natural part of the grieving process.

Unfortunately, some couples experience this kind of loss more than one time in their childbearing years. And many couples who have experienced pregnancy and early infant loss may also suffer from infertility.

In this *Handbook for Parents*, we hope to provide you with information that will help you with various aspects of your loss. We pray that you will find this as a resource of help, hope and healing.

Mother Angelica Prayer

My Lord, my baby is dead!

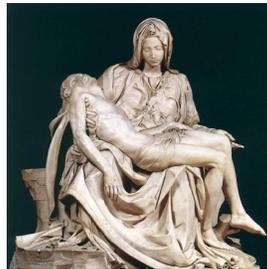
Why, my Lord—dare I ask why? He will not hear the whisper of the wind or see the beauty of its parents' face—he will not see the beauty of Your creation or the flame of a sunrise. Why, my Lord?

“Why, My child—I will tell you why.

You see, the child lives. Instead of the wind he hears the sound of angels singing before My throne. Instead of the beauty that passes he sees everlasting Beauty—he sees My face. He was created and lived a short time so the image of his parents imprinted on his face may stand before Me as their personal intercessor. He knows secrets of heaven unknown to men on earth. He laughs with a special joy that only the innocent possess. My ways are not the ways of man. I create for My Kingdom and each creature fills a place in that Kingdom that could not be filled by another. He was created for My joy and his parents' merits. He has never seen pain or sin. He has never felt hunger or pain. I breathed a soul into a seed, made it grow and called it forth.”

I thank You for the life that began for so short a time to enjoy so long an eternity.

-Mother M. Angelica



Heavenly Intercessors

St. Catherine of Siena-patron saint of miscarriages

St. Catherine of Sweden-patron saint for those who have suffered a miscarriage

St. Joseph-patron saint of the unborn

St. Gerard Majella-patron saint of expectant mothers, women in childbirth, and motherhood

St. Gianna Beretta Molla-patron saint of mothers, physicians, and unborn children

St. Rita of Cascia-patron saint of impossible cases, difficult marriages, and parenthood

Mother Teresa of Calcutta-special intercessor for difficulty getting pregnant

St. Dominic Savio-special gift of healing difficult labors through our Mother Mary

St. Colette of Corbie-patron saint of still-birth and conceiving

St. Bridgit of Kildare-patron saint of babies & midwives

Our Lady of Sorrows- title of our Blessed Mother; focuses on her intense suffering and grief during the life, passion and death of our Lord

Our Lady of Guadalupe-patronnes of the unborn. In this apparition alone does she appear to us as clearly the Patroness of the Unborn; in the manner of a pregnant mother. She holds within her the unborn Christ, proclaiming the sanctity and blessedness of life within the womb

Your Child-Draw close to your little one through prayer as you pray through your child through the power of the communion of saints.

Ideas for Further Healing

- Journal your story or share it on a blog
- Pray to St. Joseph, patron saint of the unborn, to know the sex of your baby if unknown, and name the baby (*St. Joseph was the one chosen by God to name His own Son, and since he was told the specific name to give while the child was still in the womb, he is a most fitting model and patron for this important, but difficult step. He may be prayerfully invoked for assistance in choosing and giving the name.*)
- Talk about your child by name and include your child in your family count to acknowledge your loss
- Memorialize your child in your home – i.e. candle, statue, flowers, pictures, mementos, wall signs/art
- Make a keepsake box
- Wear jewelry with your baby's name, birth stone, etc. engraved on it or with a special message/quote
- Have your child's name put in the Book of Life at the Shrine of the Holy Innocents in NYC
- See a counselor in person or online at www.catholiccounselors.com or www.twoheartscounselingandhealing.com
- Honor your baby on his/her birthday/due date. Release an environmentally friendly balloon or lantern, write a letter to your baby, volunteer or perform a random act of kindness in your child's honor, make a birthday cake to celebrate his/her life, plant a tree or flowers.
- Read healing devotionals such as, *Grieving the Child I Never Knew: A Devotional for Comfort in the Loss of Your Unborn or Newly Born Child* by Kathe Wunnenberg; *Loved Baby: 31 Devotions Helping You Grieve and Cherish Your Child After Pregnancy Loss* by Sarah Philpott, PhD; *Blessed Is The Fruit of Thy Womb: Rosary Reflections on Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss* by Heidi Indahl

Dignity of Human Life

The Catholic Church has consistently affirmed the dignity of human life. At the moment of conception, a new human being is created. The Church has always proclaimed that each human being has inestimable value and dignity and is under our heavenly Father's loving care. In addition, God's providential care for every person provides us with tremendous joy and hope.

Below are a few quotes from the Bible and Catholic teaching that are a source of our hope and trust in the Lord.

- "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (*Jeremiah 1:5*)
- "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him." (*Gen 1:27*)
- "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception." (*CCC 2270*)
- "By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being." (*The Gospel of Life, No. 2*)
- "I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." (*Samuel 1:27-28*)
- "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (*Jeremiah 29:11*)
- "Let the little children come to me." (*Matthew 19:14*)
- "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." (*Psalms 139: 13-14*)

Baptism

In many instances of early childhood loss there is no possibility to administer the sacrament of Baptism prior to the death of the child. If a child is alive, the child is to be baptized if this is possible (CIC, Can. 871). However, when the child has already died, baptism should not be administered, since the sacraments are for the living. What becomes of a child who dies in utero is a profound mystery rooted in the reality of original sin, Jesus' instruction to baptize, and God's desire to save all people. The Church's teaching is very consoling for parents who have had miscarriages or who have suffered the deaths of young children before they were baptized.

#1261 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses the status of children who die without Baptism:

As regards *children who have died without Baptism*, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them' (Mk 10:14), allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism (*original emphasis*).

While Baptism is ordinarily required for salvation, the Church recognizes that God is not bound by His sacraments and can still bring about the salvation of the unbaptized. In this vein, **the Church has recognized the desire for Baptism as having the same effects of sacramental Baptism when circumstances prevent the actual administration of the sacrament** (CCC 1258-60). Just as an adult who is invincibly ignorant of the need for Baptism may be saved through an implicit Baptism of desire, even more can we hope that an infant who died without Baptism may be saved.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a Doctor of the Church, said in response to parents asking about the fate of their miscarried child:

“Your faith spoke for this child. Baptism for this child was only delayed by time. Your faith suffices. The waters of your womb – were they not the waters of life for this child? Look at your tears. Are they not like the waters of baptism? Do not fear this. God’s ability to love is greater than our fears. Surrender everything to God.”

Commendation Ceremonies

The Church has various rites and commendation ceremonies that serve to provide hope and consolation for parents and families. The rites can vary from a simple rite, such as naming your child and commending your child in faith to the loving mercy of God, to rites which include funeral rites. Selection of the appropriate rite will depend in part upon whether or not bodily remains of your baby are available. Please work with your priest/deacon to select the rite which you deem most appropriate.

Mass of Remembrance

Each year the Diocese celebrates a Mass of Remembrance for all who have experienced the loss of a child through pregnancy or infant loss. At this Mass there is a Book of Remembrance where families may choose to enter the names of their child(ren) who have died. This Mass is a celebration of the lives of these children and, hopefully, serves as a source of consolation and hope for the families of the children.

Please search, “Mass of Remembrance” or “Day of Remembrance” on the Syracuse Diocese Events page to find a Mass of Remembrance near you.



Challenging Questions

What happens to the remains of miscarried and stillborn children?

Some miscarriages are naturally passed at home, and some require further medical assistance in a hospital. In many instances of miscarriages there are no remains of the child readily available. However, in the event that remains are available, they may be procured by the parents, the doctor, or the hospital. The parents, at their option, may ask the doctor or hospital for the remains if they are not readily offered by the medical institution for burial or cremation. NY State does not currently allow the parents the right to their child's remains before a certain threshold.

If the parents are able and choose to retain the remains of their miscarried child, it is recommended that the remains are kept cold in a suitable sealable container until the day of burial. (*There are kits available online to help with this process-see information below.*)

When a child is stillborn, there are always remains. Parents are typically advised by the hospital staff to contact a funeral home in order to make arrangements, much like a typical death.

Parents are then encouraged to contact their pastor for the appropriate commendation rite and burial arrangements.

For more information on caring for remains at home or the hospital, go to catholicmiscarriagesupport.com/practical/practical-qa/caring-for-your-babys-body/

For a kit to assist burial, Search: "Miscarriage delivery aid" at Elizabeth Ministry International elizabethministry.com

What about cremation?

Many parents who lose their child to miscarriage or stillbirth choose cremation. The Church permits cremation as long as it is not a statement of denial in the resurrection of the body. (CCC 2301)

Cremated remains should be treated with the same dignity as a deceased body.

Where should remains be buried?

The remains, whether or not they are cremated, should be interred in a grave or columbarium. It is strongly advised that the remains should be placed in a cemetery so that the dignity of the burial site can be properly protected.

Search “Burial vessels” at Elizabeth Ministry International
www.elizabethministry.com

Is there a feast day in the church where parents can remember their children?

For many parents who have lost a baby through miscarriage, stillborn birth, or early infant death, the **Feast of the Holy Innocents, celebrated on December 28th** serves as a time of remembrance. On this day the Church remembers the horror of King Herod’s jealousy of the coming Messiah when he ordered the massacre of boys under the age of 2, and the devastation of the mothers and fathers that led Matthew to quote Jeremiah 31: “A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children...” (Matthew 2:18).

The Feast of the Holy Innocents binds together all parents throughout the ages who have lost a precious child far too soon.

Resources

ONLINE

Blessing Of Parents After A Miscarriage or Stillbirth:

usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/blessing-of-parents-after-a-miscarriage-orstillbirth.cfm

Syracuse Diocesan Website: syracusediocese.org/offices/familyrespect-life/

For Your Marriage: foryourmarriage.org Search: "Miscarriage"

Elizabeth Ministry International: elizabethministry.com Search: "Miscarriage"

Support after Miscarriage: catholicmiscarriagesupport.com

The Apostolate of Hannah's Tears: hannahstears.org

International Bereaved Mothers/Fathers Day

www.CarlyMarieProjectHeal.com

Molly Bears: will make you a free teddy bear the weight of your child

www.mollybears.org

BOOKS

Support During and After Miscarriage: A Catholic Woman's Companion to Healing and Hope by Karen Edmisten

A Catholic Mother's Companion to Pregnancy, Walking with Mary from Conception to Baptism by Sarah Reinhard

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION

Gianna Center Syracuse – offers NaProTECHNOLOGY for those experiencing recurrent miscarriage. giannasyracuse.com

Unborn Book of Remembrance Church of the Holy Innocents Shrine (NYC) shrineofholyyinnocents.org/shrine-of-the-unborn

Memorial – The National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stock bridge, MA has a Shrine of the Holy Innocents where you can memorialize a child. memorialsonedenhill.org/sothi/

Hope for Bereaved Support Groups: hopeforbereaved.com

Catholic Counseling catholiccounselors.com

Two Hearts Counseling & Healing Ministry

www.twoheartscounselingandhealing.com

Psalm 139: 13-18

*You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works!*

*My very self you know.
My bones are not hidden from you,
When I was being made in secret,
fashioned in the depths of the earth.*

*Your eyes saw me unformed;
in your book all are written down;
my days were shaped, before one came to be.
How precious to me are your designs, O God;
how vast the sum of them!*

*Were I to count them, they would outnumber the sands;
when I complete them, still you are with me.*



This Pregnancy & Infant Loss Handbook was created in loving memory of:

Jeremiah, Rose, Lily, Vincenzo Louis & Gerard Michael

This handbook is available online at www.syracusediocese.org. Search "Pregnancy & Infant Loss." The Syracuse Diocese Office of Family/Respect Life Ministry grants permission to print and redistribute this handbook.

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