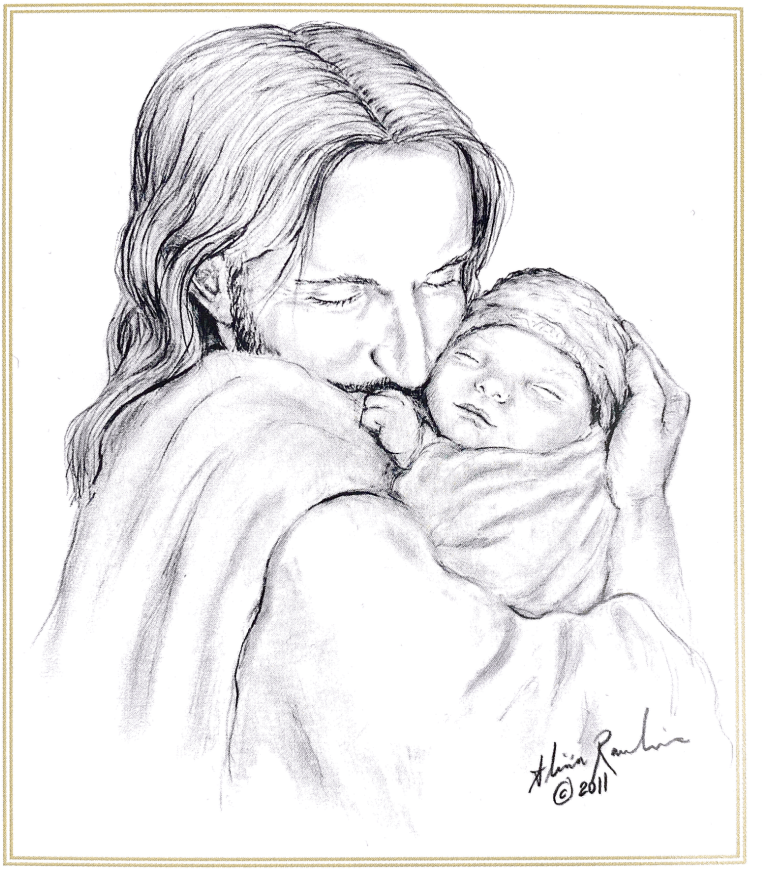


Miscarriage and Early Childhood Loss

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.



Cover image by Alicia Rawlins
courtesy of Etsy.com/shop/ChristianFineArt.

For Parents

The loss of a child is one of the most traumatic losses that one can experience in life. We are truly sorry for your loss. The grief which accompanies your loss is unique to you and this grief can vary significantly from parent to parent and among family members and friends. Your loss may be due to a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth, or early infant death. Society has often minimized or ignored the loss and grief that families have experienced through miscarriage. 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 because 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 miscarriage losses.

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

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 among many from the Bible and Catholic teaching that are a source of our hope and trust in the Lord.

- "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception." (*CCC 2270*)
- "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (*Jer 1:5*)
- "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him;" (*Gen 1:27*)
- "By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being. (*The Gospel of Life, No. 2*)

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 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.

Paragraph 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."



Rites and Commendation Ceremonies

The Church has various rites and commendation ceremonies that serve to provide hope and consolation for the parents and families. The rites can vary from a simple rite, such as naming the child and commending that 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 the miscarried child are available. Parents, under the guidance of their pastor, can select those rites which they deem most appropriate. Please contact your parish priest for more information.

Mass of Innocents

Each year the Archbishop celebrates a Mass of Remembrance for all who have experienced the loss of a child through miscarriage or other before-birth losses, or in early childhood death. 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.



Challenging Questions

What happens to the remains of a miscarried child?

In many instances of miscarriages there are no remains of the child readily available. However, in the event that remains are available, they may have been 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. At the time of the writing of this booklet, the following laws were in effect:

State law of Kansas Statute 65-67a10 (Disposition off et al remains) Every maternity center and medical care facility licensed by the department of health and environment to operate in the state shall adopt written policies and inform parents regarding their options for disposition or taking of fetal remains in an event of a fetal death.

State law of Missouri Statute 194.378 (Final disposition of fetal remains, mother has right to determine)
In every instance of fetal death, the mother has the right to determine the final disposition of the remains of the fetus, regardless of the duration of the pregnancy. The mother may choose any means of final disposition authorized by law or by the director of the department of health and senior services.

If the parents 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. (If a funeral home is involved there will likely be additional cost.)

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

What about 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. In other words, cremated remains should have their final resting place in a grave or columbarium.

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.



Catholic Cemeteries of Northeast Kansas

Catholic Cemeteries of Northeast Kansas has made special low cost arrangements for burial accommodations of miscarried children. (Please see the Catholic Cemeteries brochure on miscarriages for details or contact Catholic Cemeteries directly.) For areas not serviced by Catholic Cemeteries of Northeast Kansas please check with a local cemetery to see if special accommodations can be made.

Catholic Cemeteries of Northeast Kansas can also make special arrangements for parents who would like to memorialize their child but the remains are not available. Please contact Catholic Cemeteries or a local cemetery for available options.

Definitions

by National Institute of Child Health & Human Development

Miscarriage is the term health care providers use to describe the loss of pregnancy from natural causes before the20th week of pregnancy. Most miscarriages occur very early in pregnancy, in some cases before a woman even knows she is pregnant. Researchers estimate that, among women who already know they are pregnant, nearly 15 percent will have a miscarriage.

There are many causes of miscarriage, some of them known and others unknown. Inmost cases, there is nothing a woman can do to prevent a miscarriage.

Stillbirth is the loss of pregnancy due to natural causes after the 20th week of pregnancy. It can occur before delivery or during delivery.

Resources for Parents

Miscarriage and Early Childhood Loss Handbook for Parents by Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

Mourning a Miscarriage booklet by Elizabeth Ministry

Additional information on miscarriage and grief
Elizabeth Ministry International | www.elizabethministry.com

Other Information

Catholic Cemeteries
913-371-4040 | www.CatholicCemeteriesKC.org
(See Catholic Cemeteries brochure regarding miscarriages.)

Burial vessels – Elizabeth Ministry International
www.elizabethministry.com

Miscarriage delivery aid – Elizabeth Ministry International | www.elizabethministry.com

You formed my inmost being;

you knit me in my mother's womb.

I praise you, so wonderfully you made me;

wonderful are your works!

My very self you knew.

My bones were not hidden from you,

when I was being made in secret,

fashioned as in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes foresaw my actions;

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;

to finish, I would need eternity.

Psalm 139:13-18

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