

## Loving Parents After Miscarriage

by Mary McClusky

A friend who recently lost a child through miscarriage called to express disappointment that she didn't know where to turn for the resources and support she and her husband so desperately needed. This heartbreaking conversation reminded me of another friend who miscarried a child at six months of pregnancy but who masked her pain with a smile instead of reaching out for comfort. Though each experienced the deep pain of losing a child, neither received the loving support she deserved.

Sadly, their experiences are common. Though most miscarriages occur very early in pregnancy, often before the woman knows she is pregnant, as many as 15% of known pregnancies end in miscarriage. Our culture and even some church communities don't always recognize this loss, leaving women or couples to deal with their pain alone.

Our witness to life must address the pain and grieving experienced by those who have lost a child. Just as we recognize the humanity of the unborn child lost to abortion, we must acknowledge equally the unborn child lost to miscarriage. "I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity," Pope Francis said recently (Interview with Fr. Spadaro). As Catholics and people of life, we are called to draw close to these parents and provide care and comfort to their aching hearts.

So what can we do to help parents grieve their loss and witness to the gift of their child's life? We can acknowledge their loss, support them as they grieve, and direct them to helpful resources. How do we do this?

First, don't dismiss their loss with comments like "You're young; you'll conceive again soon," or "You still have your other children." Instead, make time to listen

as they share their pain. Affirm their right to grieve. Offer your condolences and prayers, and ask if there is anything they need. Direct the parents to their parish priest, who can help them organize a memorial service, funeral, or burial. The Order of Christian Funerals has prayers for a stillborn child, and the Book of Blessings includes a blessing for parents that can be administered by a priest or deacon after a miscarriage. Some blessings can even be adapted for use by a layperson.

Keep in mind that the father and mother may have different emotional needs. She might feel the loss more directly or wonder if somehow she caused the miscarriage. She might prefer to talk things out with a friend. The father may need space to eventually feel comfortable sharing how the loss affects him and may even need time to take his mind off things. He might need guidance on how to support the mother. Losing a child can drive parents apart, so the couple might need the reassuring love of a faithful community to keep close and stay together. Child loss or bereavement support groups at their parish or local hospital can provide support, as well as spiritual advice or counseling.

As members of the Body of Christ, the Church, we are called to bear witness to the loss of every life, no matter how brief or small. Let us pray that our growing sensitivity to the loss of a child through miscarriage will better assist grieving parents and help them to entrust their child to God's unfailing care and mercy. For resources on miscarriage, visit [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org).

*Mary McClusky is Assistant Director for Education & Outreach at the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. To learn more about the bishops' pro-life activities, go to [www.usccb.org/prolife](http://www.usccb.org/prolife).*