

# Ministering to Parents in the Face of Prenatal Infant Loss



No matter what the stage in life, losing a child is a painful experience for mothers, fathers, siblings, and other loved ones. Although these individuals can grieve and learn to live despite the loss they have experienced, the reality of losing a child will never actually disappear. This holds true in the case of a little life that passes away before or during birth. Just as much as any other parent who has lost a child, the preborn child's parents often feel deprived of the chance to experience life with their little one. No one will ever know their preborn child like they do. As such, these parents feel particularly isolated, feeling as if they are going through the pain and heartbreak of losing a child alone. When offering pastoral care in this situation, strongly consider the following:

1. **Listen.** When approached by an individual or a couple who has lost a child in the womb, give them a space to be open about what they are going through. Let them know

that they are heard and that you are there for them.

2. **Understand.** Remember the needs of the father and siblings. Although infant loss hits a mother the hardest, do not forget that the father is also grieving for his child and siblings for their brother or sister. Let them know that you care and are here for them.

3. **Counsel.** Allow and encourage the individual(s) to grieve. Remind them that the pain they are going through is very real, even if they feel like a child lost in the womb was hidden to a greater degree than in any other case of loss. Give them space to experience the common stages of grieving/loss: 1) denial and isolation, 2) anger, 3) bargaining, 4) depression, and 5) acceptance.

4. **Assist.** To the best of your ability, assist with the individuals' practical needs as they are grieving. Offer

to cook them a meal, spend some special time with their other children, pick up groceries, etc. Connect them to a group in your church that offers this kind of assistance to grieving families, if one exists, or consider starting one if not.



Help the grieving individuals move toward acceptance by proposing an opportunity to memorialize the child they have lost. Consider a service in the lost child's memory. Offer to contribute to a headstone if there is going to be a burial.

Avoid comments like these:

- "God has a purpose for everything" or "Maybe this is God's way of saying He didn't want this baby to suffer." God does not desire for miscarriage, stillbirth, or other complications resulting in infant loss.
- "I can imagine how you feel." Unless you have lost a child, you cannot.
- "Let me know if there is anything I can do." Don't put the burden on the grieving individual to come up with something he/she needs help with and then to ask for it. Offer specific and practical means of support.

## For Further Assistance:

Ava's Grace, a local ministry, can connect grieving parents with resources to meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs following a tragic infant loss.

Contact person:

Lisa Everett, Director of Marriage and Family Ministry, Secretariat for Evangelization and Discipleship.

leverett@diocesefwsb.org