



William B. Brunson

Picture these family snapshots.

Parents hugging the son who has just helped his junior high team win their game; a high school couple just leaving home for the prom, a petite ballerina in her sequined tutu.

Now switch to a different picture.

A couple is standing in a doctor's office. Their arms are wrapped around each other, each depending on the other to stand up. The doctor has just left them alone in the room after telling them the results of the ultrasound—they have lost the baby. A miscarriage. A life ended before it really had a chance to begin. Their hearts are broken. They had only known for a few weeks but that makes no difference—it was their baby and now it is dead.

“Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more” (Jeremiah 31:15).

Too often in the church we do not give enough parents who suffer a miscarriage the support or compassion that they need. Too often we find ourselves saying things that we think will help, when nothing can.

Psychologist, obstetricians and counselors have all realized that

couples who have lost their unborn child may experience a time of grief and mourning as though it were the death of a full term child. They offer classes, support groups, extensive writings, hot lines, and listening ears. We, as a church, need to come to the same realization that miscarriage is a very real loss. It does not deserve to be discounted or written off, but that child deserves to be mourned and that family deserves to be comforted.

But how do we do this? What can we do or say to a couple in this situation? When my wife and I found ourselves going home from the obstetrician no longer pregnant, we were fortunate in one sense. We had a very supportive and loving congregation who wrapped their arms around us and allowed us to grieve. They also allotted us the same traditions of the church typically only expressed at the loss of a full term person. My wife's Sunday school class and United Methodist Women's Circle provided meals for us so that we would not have to deal with cooking for ourselves or our two other children. Our mailbox filled with sympathy cards from church members. Our house filled with flowers from family, church members, and our District Superintendent and district ministerial association. We were very fortunate to have such loving and compassionate people in our lives. But everyone deserves to have the same care and compassion shown to them.

What does your church do in such a case? Traditionally churches only use the “Service of Christian Marriage” and the “Service of Death and Resurrection” found in our *Book of Worship*. However, there are other services which could and should be used by every church. One of those is the “Service of Hope after Loss of Pregnancy.” This service puts into words some of what the father and mother are feeling.

It helps express to them the feelings of their friends and family—feeling which they cannot adequately phrase. It can be used in a gathering of the family members or a time arranged for family and friends to gather in the sanctuary, a chapel, a garden, or the unborn child's nursery. Through this service the parents can experience the love and support of their family and/or friends, and perhaps it can help them begin to find their way out of the valley of the shadow of death.

If your church does not wish to use that resource, then create a tradition or a symbol for your congregation. Lay a pink, red, or white flower on the altar in memory of the child that was lost. Invite the congregation to bow in a time of silent prayer for the parents and siblings of the unborn child. Or remember any miscarriages during an All Saints Day Remembrance Service. Given time and prayer each church can develop a ritual of recognition for the parents and the child; we only need to take the time and devote the prayer.

This is a very real loss. It is a time of hurt and confusion. It is a time of questions. It is a time when the parents are mourning the loss of hopes, dreams, and relationship that will never be. They mourn the child whom they will never hold, but who they will always love. Their ever-caring, ever-loving and ever-compassionate God offers them consolation and strength during this time of tears and weakness, and so should God's church. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall find comfort. □



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