

If you are visiting this page because you have experienced the loss of a baby, we would like to extend our deepest sympathies. Losing a baby can be devastating at any gestation or age after birth. As Catholics, we believe that life begins at conception. Your baby was made in the image and likeness of God and is an unrepeatable gift.

Support

Speaking with other families who have lost a baby can be helpful in many ways. Even though every family's experience varies and everyone grieves differently, being supported by a group who understands some of the emotions you are feeling and the challenges you face daily can be very comforting. Below is a list of parish-based support groups in the metro area:

[Epiphany](#) of the Lord, Oklahoma City
[St. John the Baptist](#), Edmond

If you are unable to attend a support group in person or are more comfortable with an online community, there is a private Facebook group called "Mommy To A Little Saint - Catholic Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support".

Individual counseling can also be beneficial as you navigate your journey through grief. Check with your health insurance provider to see if your policy covers mental health services and to find covered providers. If you do not have coverage through your health insurance, some providers offer services on a sliding scale. Below are additional resources for individual counseling:

[Catholic Charities](#)
[Raphael House](#) at St. John the Baptist, Edmond
[Oklahoma County Health Department recommendations](#)
[Oklahoma State Health Department recommendations](#)

Ways to Remember and Honor Your Baby

If you have not yet selected a name for your baby, consider doing so. Even if you do not know the sex of your baby, there are many options for choosing a name. You can select a gender neutral name (Alex, Julian, etc.), select both a masculine and feminine name for your baby's first and middle names (Michael Mary) or give your baby a gendered name based on a feeling you may have had about their sex. There is no right or wrong way to go about naming your baby. Naming your child can offer you a more specific way to talk about and remember your little one.

In addition to naming your baby, you can have him or her memorialized in any number of ways. The following links will help you find one (or several!) ways to honor your baby:

[Shrine of the Unborn](#)
[Elizabeth Ministry Memorial](#)

If the loss of your baby was recorded by the state (for losses occurring after 12 weeks gestation) you can request a [Memorial Certificate](#) from the Oklahoma State Health Department.

Ways the Church Can Help

The Catholic Church offers solace to grieving parents through various liturgical rites and blessings. You can request that the name of your baby or Baby X (i.e. your last name) to be included in the prayers of the faithful for the recently departed. You can also contact your priest and request the [Blessing of Parents After Miscarriage or Stillbirth](#) and discuss which rites might be appropriate for your situation. These can include the Vigil for a Deceased Child, a Funeral or Memorial Liturgy (either within or outside Mass), the Rite of Committal and the Rite of Final Commendation for an Infant.

Burial Arrangements and Other Considerations

Many losses occur early in a pregnancy and a burial is not possible. In some cases, you may not have kept the remains after miscarrying or perhaps you sought medical treatment and the remains stayed with the hospital. If burial is not possible for your baby, please do not feel guilty. Decisions about fetal remains are usually made in moments of extreme grief, fear, or isolation; in many circumstances we simply do not know what to do or how to ask. God knows your heart and He knows your circumstances. Even if your child's final resting place is unknown, please rest in His love and mercy.

If you have not yet delivered your baby:

Your healthcare provider will consider your individual circumstances to determine if you should miscarry through expectant management (watchful waiting), medical management (usually medication) or surgical management (medical procedure). All three are discussed [here](#), and special consideration is given to how these methods align with church teaching. You might consider engaging a bereavement doula to walk with you through labor and delivery. Stillbirthday maintains a [listing](#) of doulas that are trained in bereavement. Check to see if one is available in your area.

Miscarriage at Home:

You may be apprehensive about what to expect during the physical process of miscarrying and the condition of your baby. Catholic Miscarriage Support offers information about what most women can expect [here](#), and recommendations for caring for your baby's remains as you await their burial are available [here](#). Kits are available for purchase from [Elizabeth Ministry](#) and [Heaven's Gain](#) to aid in recovering your baby's remains during delivery. Some may find it helpful to view pictures to know what to expect as they miscarry and others may find pictures extremely upsetting. If after prayerful consideration you wish to view images to help you identify your baby and be prepared, links are available [here](#).

If you miscarry at a medical facility or are having a surgical procedure to manage your miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy and you wish to request the remains, [here](#) are some recommendations for navigating hospital procedures. Each healthcare facility has their own policies and procedures and you may have to advocate for your preferences. You can also inquire if your hospital has their own burial program in which you can participate. Effective November 1, 2019, healthcare providers in the state of Oklahoma are required to notify parents of their right to direct treatment of their baby's remains for losses at or after 12 weeks gestation.

Remembrance Photography

[Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep](#) is an organization of volunteer professional photographers. NILMDTS offers heirloom quality portraiture free of charge to families who lose a baby before or shortly after birth and who have reached at least 22 weeks gestation. NILMDTS also offers professional [retouching](#) services for families who were unable to have an affiliated photographer take photos of their baby.

Making Burial Arrangements

Many cemeteries have a special area for infants and those spaces are generally less expensive than a regular plot. Additionally, some cemeteries will allow miscarried babies to be interred in a family member's existing grave or in a columbarium niche. Every cemetery has their own regulations so it is important to ask about what options may be available. If burying your baby will present a financial hardship, ask the cemetery office if there is financial assistance available.

If there is a cemetery at your parish, contact the parish office for arrangements. Special rates may be available for parishioners.

Each cemetery has specific requirements about whether a funeral director must be used and what type of vessel must be used for interment. Some funeral homes offer basic services free of charge or for a minimal fee to families who lose a baby. Depending on cemetery regulations and also the gestational age of your baby, a small wooden box (purchased at your local craft store or handmade) could be decorated as a couple/family and used as a burial vessel. The following organizations also have different options to choose from:

[Elizabeth Ministry](#)

[Heaven's Gain](#)

[Trappist Caskets](#)

There are several organizations that will provide a burial gown to families who lose a baby. If you deliver at home or if your hospital does not provide you with a gown, [Angel Gowns Foundation of Oklahoma](#) works directly with families who lose a baby at any gestation.

Common Questions

Can my baby be baptized? Is my baby in heaven if he or she did not receive the sacrament of baptism?

Catholics believe baptism, like all the sacraments, is for the living. If your child is already deceased, then he/she will not be able to receive the sacrament of baptism. However, if your child has died without baptism, there are other rituals and blessings that they can receive. The Order of Christian Funerals, for example, includes provisions for celebrating a funeral for a child who has died before baptism. There are also blessings for parents after a miscarriage. Please discuss with your pastor which rituals and blessings might be appropriate to your situation.

If your baby has received a life-limiting prenatal diagnosis and is not expected to survive long after birth, it is important to note that under ordinary circumstances, only bishops, priests and deacons are allowed to baptize a person. You might wish to have a plan in place to have a priest or deacon present at birth. In the case of an emergency, however, **anyone** can perform a baptism. (CCC, [1256](#))

If your baby dies in utero or before receiving the sacrament of baptism, you have reason to hope that your baby is with God in heaven. While God has bound salvation to the sacrament of baptism, He himself is not bound by his sacraments (CCC, [1257](#)) In other words, we live by the rules God has given us because we need them, but God is all-knowing, all-loving, and all-merciful and we can trust our children to his care. Sacred Scripture tells us specifically about God's love for children in [Jeremiah 1:5](#), [Isaiah 49:1b](#) and [Luke 18:15-17](#).

“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," allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism.” (CCC [1261](#))

For an in depth discussion of Church teaching, see the [International Theological Commission's](#) study on the topic.

Is my baby an angel now?

No. Catholic teaching holds that angels are spiritual and non-corporeal beings. (CCC, [328](#)) Angels are not simply humans that have “gotten their wings,” they have been present since creation and are in a class of their own. While it can be comforting for some families to think of their babies as angels, a more appropriate and equally consoling theory is discussed [here](#).

Someone I care about is grieving the loss of a baby. What are some things I can do to help support them?

The death of an infant in the womb or after birth can be a very isolating experience for parents. Oftentimes, friends and family avoid talking about the baby out of fear that they will upset the parents. Don't be afraid to mention the baby by name or ask how the parents how they are coping. Be willing to sit with a grieving parent while they cry or talk through their emotions, as this can be a source of great comfort. If you don't know what to say, simply express your sorrow. You do not need to offer advice or special words of condolence, your presence and

willingness to listen are the best gift. Oftentimes when someone is grieving, simple, everyday tasks can be overwhelming. Offer to help with meals, laundry, housework or childcare. For more ideas on how to care for a friend or loved one, the following blogs have some thoughtful suggestions:

[Mary Haseltine](#)
[Mothering Spirit](#)

Other Resources

Below are additional resources that we hope will offer comfort and healing:

Recommended Reading

[After Miscarriage](#): A Catholic Woman's Companion to Healing and Hope

[Grieving Together](#): A Couple's Journey through Miscarriage

[Blessed Is the Fruit of Thy Womb](#): Rosary Reflections on Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss

Helpful blogs/websites

[Stillbirthday](#)

[Catholic Miscarriage Support](#)

[Elizabeth Ministry](#)

[Mary Haseltine](#)

If your baby has received a life-limiting diagnosis

[Carrying To Term](#)

[Be Not Afraid](#)

[Perinatal Hospice and Palliative Care](#)

If you would like to expand this ministry at your home parish, contact the Office of Marriage and Family Life Ministry at the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City for more information:

aschimpf@archokc.org or 405-709-2755.