

Remembrance of Your Baby

This document applies to all parents who have lost a child in utero. For losses past 20 weeks gestation (where remains are automatically and legally released to the next of kin), AND for any loss where remains are present, please also see "Funeral Arrangements" for pertinent information to that process.

"Something that is personal to me is the way that we as individuals, as a Church, and as a society respond to miscarriage. If we believe what we say, that a unique human person is created at conception as science shows us, then the death of that person no matter how early, should be treated as such. Whether it is our own loss or someone close to us, being a people who value every human life means that when it comes to miscarriage we need to respond accordingly. I don't believe we will be taken seriously as a pro-life people until we adequately respond to those around us who are grieving their unborn children." *Mary Haseltine, Mary Haseltine, author of Made for This: The Catholic Mom's Guide to Birth in a blog post entitled "Honoring Life in the Midst of Grief."*

Here are some of Mary's points in that post, rewritten with diocesan input/ local resources, on how to acknowledge the reality of your baby and remember him or her:

- Consider naming your baby, regardless of how far along your child was when he or she died. It can be so comforting to know that your baby has a name and to be able to ask that baby's intercession for your family. It is also helpful for siblings to have a name to connect with their brother or sister in heaven and to ask for their prayers. You can even do this if it has been years since you lost your baby. If you do not know the gender of your child, consider names that are gender neutral or given to both genders (like Mary, which is in the name of both male and female saints, or Francis/Frances, or the names of virtues); in the end, giving a name is a way that the Lord allows us to participate in creation, and whatever you choose will be a blessing for your child and your family. We provide a naming ceremony pamphlet that incorporates much of the USCCB's blessing for Parents After a Miscarriage and is a beautiful aid to formalizing this process and receiving the Church's blessing at a difficult time of grieving.
- If you do have other children, consider talking about their sibling in an age-appropriate way. It can be so powerful for them to know that they have a little sibling.
- "Allow yourself time to grieve. A miscarriage is a big deal. It's not just a lost dream or an unfortunate health issue. It is the death of your child and you deserve to mourn it as such. It's okay and right to be sad. It's okay and right to take a while. It's okay and right to not feel like yourself for months or even years. You will heal. You will never forget your child. The rawness will likely wear off (and that's okay and right, too) but it's okay to feel like there is always someone missing." *Mary Haseltine*
- *Grieving Together: A Couple's Journey through Miscarriage* by Laura and Franco Fanucci is a wonderful resource to work through together. There is no timetable for grief.
- Don't be afraid to talk about your baby. Finding another parent of loss for a chat can be very helpful, but it is okay to speak to others as well, and to accept their support during this time. Please see the documents "What to Say and Not to Say" and "Gift Ideas for Parents After Loss" as they can be helpful to hand to loved ones when you just don't feel up to discussion. In Bismarck/Mandan, there is a network of parents of loss called Angel Babies for mutual support. The Office of Family Ministry can help connect you to them (701-595-0564).

- Allow yourself time to heal physically. Rest and listen to your medical professionals as your circumstances and situation will dictate your own healing time and needs. You may want to take a few days off work, or many days depending on the circumstances. Give yourself room for that. Be aware of the signs and symptoms of post-partum depression and anxiety and report them to your doctor.
- Add your child's name to:
 - The Book of Life at The Church of the Holy Innocents in New York. A perpetual candle is lit in honor of these children and Mass is offered for them on the first Monday of every month.
 - The Book of Intentions at The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin. These children will be remembered daily at Mass, and whenever you join in prayer via the online memorial book.
- Have a Mass said for them at your own parish. These are normally requested along with a small donation to the church or priest through the parish office.
- In the Diocese of Bismarck, there is a Mass for God's Children yearly in the fall. More information can be found at the diocesan website; at these masses, you are able every year to register your child's name for the program and carry a flower to the Marian statue in honor of each child lost, and meet other parents who have been where you are now.
- Visit a counselor as needed. There are no timetables for grief, but grief must be addressed with patience and acceptance, and a counselor can help guide you through this process. Families seeking therapeutic intervention can request assistance through the Angel Names Association's Grief Recovery Assistance Program (GRASP), which provides funding for uninsured and underinsured families pursuing counseling services to work through the grief of stillbirth (eligibility is based on a 20 week or later loss).
- There are also countless small ways to remember your child that are still very comforting:
 - Hang a Christmas ornament or a stocking in their memory.
 - Keep any mementos of your child such as the ultrasound picture, the positive pregnancy test, or cards in a special box.
 - Plant a tree or flower in their memory. Cashman's Nursery has generously donated a tree to your child's memory; just bring this certificate to the nursery in Bismarck to make a selection.
 - Participate in Pregnancy and Infant Loss Rememberance Month in October, and the affiliated Wave of Light on October 15th.
 - If you feel called, share about your experience with others.
 - Make a donation in their memory to a crisis pregnancy center, your parish, our Max's Mission, or any charity that is personal to your family.
 - Order from Molly Bears, custom bears weighted to your child's birth weight (requests must be placed by parents, and there is usually a wait list)

*Excerpted from <https://www.maryhaseltine.com/2013/10/honoring-life-in-midst-of-grief-how-to.html>
Resources added by Diocese of Bismarck*