Overcoming Obstacles: Miscarriage

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The Rite of Marriage includes three direct questions posed to the couple. The third of these is “Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” While couples answer “yes” to this question every day, it probably doesn’t occur to most that perhaps children may not be a part of the future. The Rite almost implies that children will be a part of the couple’s lives. Yet 15% of all recognized pregnancies end in miscarriage, and it is estimated that as many as 50% of all pregnancies result in miscarriage, since most miscarriages happen before a woman even knows that she is pregnant.

The Catholic Church rightly insists on the sanctity of life from the moment of conception, but we need to do a better job of ritualizing the loss of life when a miscarriage does occur. Couples often bear this grief in silence and confusion. The world seems to be telling them that a life was not lost, that a tragedy has not happened. And yet, parents know otherwise. Their hearts and minds cope with grief and sorrow that is no less real for going unaffirmed.

When a couple experiences the pain of miscarriage people may try to be helpful and supportive, but often their words are more of an obstacle than an aid to healing. Here is some wisdom that has helped others through this silent sorrow:

**It is right to grieve.** People may say things like, “It’s just as well; there was probably something wrong with the baby,” or “Well, at least you know you can get pregnant.” Such comments can lead us to think that there’s really no reason to feel sad. But remember: a life has been lost, along with the many dreams you had for this baby. Take the time to grieve and be gentle with yourself as you are grieving. Treat yourself like a best friend and give yourself permission to be good to yourself during this difficult time.

**Surround yourself with people who understand, and avoid people who don’t.** Even your best friend may not know how to support you. If necessary, avoid her or him for a while, and seek out others who have been through this sad experience and can validate your feelings. Give yourself permission to share with some people and not with others.

**Name your baby.** This simple yet profound action is a concrete way of affirming that this life was and is a unique person. It can even be helpful to put the child’s name on a Christmas ornament, a stone in your garden, or some other place where you will see it.

**Pray even when words won’t come.** God is indescribably near to the broken-hearted, although it may seem like God is very far away. Speak words from your heart, even if they are words of anger, rage, disappointment, frustration or hopelessness. God has heard it all (even from His
beloved Son) and is big enough to handle your grief. You are carrying a special sorrow and are united to the sufferings of Christ in a unique way.

**Men and women grieve miscarriage differently.** Some women find the site “Hannah’s Prayer Ministries” particularly helpful as they grieve miscarriage. Some local Catholic hospitals have a support group for those experiencing pregnancy loss. Some spouses may want to be alone. While others may want to meet with a spiritual director or friend to share the burden. Some spouses discover that exercise can be healing, while other spouses find that just putting around can be helpful. Find out what works for you and be gentle with yourself.

**Ask your local parish to begin a yearly Mass for Hope and Healing.** We began this in our parish seven years ago as a way to give voice to our grief and to pray for comfort and strength. Each year, this liturgy attracts people from the area, some who experienced pregnancy loss years, even decades, ago.

**You are not alone: ask for help if you need it.** We are all members of the Body of Christ and are never alone in our pain. God desires to bring healing in our lives and frequently uses others as instruments of healing. If your grief turns to depression or anxiety, seek professional help. Call your local parish for a referral to a therapist or Catholic Charities.

*Maureen and Jim offer marriage workshops and retreats. They have experienced infertility and multiple miscarriages. To learn more go to: [www.eucharisticmarriage.com](http://www.eucharisticmarriage.com).*