



Made Known

CHURCH PAMPHLET

“Talk to me about the truth of religion and I’ll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I’ll listen submissively. But don’t come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don’t understand.” – C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

CHURCH STAFF

When a family in your congregation loses a baby at any point during pregnancy or right after birth, they inevitably struggle with terrible questions.

- » Did God plan for our baby to die?
- » Did God allow our baby to die?
- » What did I do for God to punish me in this way?
- » Why didn’t God take me instead/too?

As a member of this family’s church staff, you are likely to be most trusted with these impossible questions. While bereaved parents will rarely reach out for help, it is up to you to approach the family and offer a listening ear.

The most important thing to remember as a representative of the church—and for many, a representative of God—is that **you do not need to answer for or defend God**. God can handle the anger, hurt and accusatory questions. The best you can do is listen and convey that God’s heart breaks with them.

You also have the role of encouraging the family to celebrate the short life of their baby.

- » A memorial can be an important healing step for families to take- one that they may have overlooked. The suggestion also speaks volumes about how deeply the church—and God—cares for the family’s baby.

Here are a few suggestions to help you, as a member of the church staff, comfort families in your congregation who are experiencing this type of invisible loss:

- » At the hospital be sure the family has been offered:
 - A chance to see and hold their baby.
 - Private time with their baby.
 - Photographs.
 - Mementos.
 - The presence of family and friends.
 - Funeral options.
- » If you are present at the hospital, touch and hold the baby (if the parents are comfortable with this).
- » Make the blessing/baptism ritual special—don’t rush it.
- » If possible, know the baby’s gender .

- » Call the baby by name .
- » Ask to see photographs of the baby.
- » Comment on the baby's characteristics .
- » Call the family a week after they leave the hospital, then a month, six months, and a year later.
- » Ask the family's permission to mention them and their baby at a prayer meeting or in prayer during a regular service.
- » Connect the family to another couple who has had a similar loss.

CHURCH MEMBERS

Even if the family whose baby died is not a close friend, as a member of their church family you can make a huge difference by meeting them in their grief. They might have complicated and mixed feelings about the role of the church and of God as they heal from this tragedy. Your presence will remind them that God has not abandoned them in their grief, and that His heart is breaking right alongside theirs.

The most important thing to remember as a representative of the church is that **you do not need to answer for or defend God**. Leave their impossible questions surrounding God's role in death and loss unanswered. The truth is we do not know the answers, and attempting to answer impossible questions can be incredibly hurtful to the bereaved parents.

Instead, truly listen with empathy. If you are not close enough to sit and cry with the parents, show your broken heart in one or more of the following ways:

- » Organize meals from the congregation.
- » Send flowers and a handwritten note.
- » Include older siblings by organizing or sending gift cards for a fun family day out to celebrate and remember their little brother or sister.
- » Learn the baby's gender and/or name if possible and use it in conversation.
- » If you've experienced a similar loss, reach out by saying "I know a little of what you are feeling..." but be careful not to say you know just how they feel; every loss is different.
- » Mobilize the church group you are in (small group, choir, womens or mens ministries, bible study, etc) to make or purchase a keepsake for the family which honors their baby.
- » Collect money to donate to an organization of the parents' choice in honor of their baby.
- » Remember the baby who died as a member of their family.
- » Be patient—know there is no wrong way to grieve, and the bereaved parents will be changed from this experience.

Books

When a Baby Dies by Rana K. Limbo & Sara Rich Wheeler
Don't Take My Grief Away From Me by Doug Manning
A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis

Suggested Information

<http://www.northsidepnl.com/for-family--friends.html>