

A PASTORAL APPROACH TO COUNSELING BELIEVERS IN PREGNANCY LOSS

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## **Abstract**

The stark reality of pregnancy loss and the manner in which pregnancy loss ministry is mistreated or ignored in our world present compelling reasons for pastors to seriously consider how they will respond in such situations. Many grieving parents mourn in silence while their pain goes unnoticed or encounter an insensitive world when they do share their grief. There is also a wide variety of approaches Christians take to this question, even among Lutherans. This paper aims to help Lutheran pastors minister to believers who have suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth. With the input of Lutheran pastors and theologians, past and present, I examine the biblical foundations for valuing the life of unborn children and for the comfort and hope that Christians can receive in pregnancy loss. Pastors can point grieving believers to the sure promises God has made about their children and can treat them as they would any other departed believer. Pastors also need to equip themselves for the various challenges which pregnancy loss presents. The pastor who properly prepares himself to minister to believers after pregnancy loss will be better equipped to bring them comfort and guidance as they carry this heavy cross.

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## 1. Introduction

The death of any loved one is most often a life-changing event. Whether the deceased is a relative or a close friend, an inexpressible grief can overcome the survivors. In the fear of death and of what happens to our departed loved ones Paul directs all believers to encourage the grieving with the promises of Christ and the hope of the resurrection (1 Th 4:13-18).

The death of a child during pregnancy is also a life-changing event, but unfortunately the death of these children often does not gain the attention and care it deserves today. This has not always been the case. Dr. Thomas Moe, a United Methodist pastor, maintains that “ministry to people who have experienced any of these losses should have been developed long ago. Unfortunately, we are only at the genesis stage of this ministry.”<sup>1</sup> Part of the problem is that many do not realize just how common pregnancy loss is. Even when people do hear of pregnancy loss there is a tendency to either ignore it or find some way to minimize it, perhaps as “a slight bump on the road of life.”<sup>2</sup> Not even Christians, who this side of heaven still struggle as sinner-saints, are immune to the influence of a society that treats pregnancy loss in this way.

Because people in general are either unaware of the reality of pregnancy loss or simply do not take the time to think about it, many couples find themselves unprepared and stunned if they do lose a child in pregnancy. My wife and I can be counted among them. Several years ago we discovered she was pregnant with our first child. Several weeks after that we learned that we were blessed to be expecting not just one child, but triplets. Several days later we were shocked to find out that all three of our children, whom we named Lyla, Eliana, and Silas, had died. Looking back on our experience we realize there is nothing we could have done to prevent their deaths, but we also reflect on what we wish we would have done differently in responding to this loss. And we were not the only ones.<sup>3</sup>

Our experience is what led me to pursue this topic. I have done so in the hope that others may be prepared to deal with the pregnancy loss that may come into their own lives and that will

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Moe, *Pastoral Care in Pregnancy Loss: A Ministry Long Needed* (New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1997), 67.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Lewis, “Why miscarriage matters when you’re pro-life,” *The Lewis Note*, February 21, 2014, <http://thelewisnote.blogspot.com/2014/02/why-miscarriage-matters-if-youre-pro.html> (accessed November 9, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Marie Allen and Shelly Marks, *Miscarriage: Women Sharing From the Heart* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993), 78.

almost certainly affect others they know. This issue deserves more attention not just because of the reality of pregnancy loss, but also because of how it is often mishandled in our world. From a Christian perspective it is clear that this is not how things should be. I intend to reveal the problems involved with the taboo of miscarriage and will propose some ways that this situation can be improved.

In doing this I will direct my thoughts at *Lutheran pastors* in particular. What is said here may certainly be of benefit to any believer, but pastors in particular are in a position to bring about widespread, positive change among their own congregations and communities. They are most likely to detect problems and to have continuous contact with grieving parents after a pregnancy loss.<sup>4</sup>

This paper will also focus specifically on how a pastor may counsel *believers* in pregnancy loss. This is not to say that the grief and pain of unbelievers is any less real or important, but in trying to tackle such a huge issue it is wise to treat issues one step at a time. In pregnancy loss situations the Lutheran pastor will typically be counseling their own members rather than unbelievers. Furthermore, I will examine what one might call *unintended pregnancy loss*, that is, ministry to those suffering from a miscarriage or stillbirth rather than abortion. There will still be much overlap that could be applied to abortion, but since in recent decades abortion has received much more attention than miscarriage or stillbirth, the latter will primarily command our attention here.

There are a number of approaches Christians have taken to the issue of pregnancy loss over the centuries, even among Lutherans. For that reason, and because all Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for our spiritual growth (2 Ti 3:16), we will first take a look at the biblical reasons for believers to value unborn life. Next we will study how pregnancy loss in particular is described in Scripture. Then we will proceed to lay out the biblical support for how pastors can comfort believing parents with the same comfort they would use in ministering at the death of another Christian. Building upon this scriptural foundation we will examine the specific problems surrounding pregnancy loss today and suggest several ways pastors can remedy these issues. A number of appendices have also been provided for further reflection on this topic.

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Kirkley-Best, et al. "On stillbirth : an open letter to the clergy," *Journal Of Pastoral Care* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 1982): 19.

One further component to the research behind this paper is that I wanted to communicate with current WELS pastors to hear their input on this issue. I sent a survey to ten WELS pastors at larger congregations in the Milwaukee area, in the hope that the larger size of their congregations would mean they had more experience in counseling for pregnancy loss.<sup>5</sup> Six out of these ten pastors responded, and I was able to conduct an informal follow-up interview with one of them. The input from these pastors will be used throughout this paper.

In times of pregnancy loss Lutheran pastors can direct believers to the sure and certain promises he has made regarding their children. Though parents will certainly grieve and perhaps wonder why this tragedy has fallen upon them, pastors can comfort them with the knowledge that God is the God of their children as well. Believers can take comfort in the hope of the resurrection and a joyful reunion with their children. In order to minister during pregnancy loss, pastors will need to understand the world they and their people live in so that they can recognize the pain God's children are feeling as they mourn their own children. Then they can apply the appropriate comfort of God's word and help parents manage their grief in a healthy and God-pleasing way.

## 2. Literature Review

Since this paper is written from a Lutheran perspective for Lutheran pastors in particular, I thought it would be useful to include a historical overview of the ways Lutherans have approached the question of unbaptized infants and counseling for pregnancy loss. This overview is found in Appendix A. Although this paper does not compare the Lutheran approach to pregnancy loss to that of other Christian denominations, pastors will want to have a basic understanding of what other Christians are saying. No single book provides an in-depth history and comparison of various Christians on the question of the fate of unbaptized infants. However, two books do provide concise summaries that are useful.

In his book *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, John Sanders includes a discussion of the fate of unbaptized infants in an appendix.<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps

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<sup>5</sup> The survey questions are included as Appendix C.

<sup>6</sup> John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 287-305.

the most helpful overview of basic Christian approaches to the fate of unbaptized infants.

Sanders summarizes four general Christian answers to this question:

1. Only some are saved – only those who are baptized (according to some Roman Catholics, some Lutherans, and Anglicans) – or elect (according to some Calvinists).
2. No answer can be given concerning whether those dying unbaptized are saved or lost (a traditional Lutheran position).
3. Infants mature after death and are evangelized after a certain period of maturation. No guarantees are given, however, that all infants will grow up and accept Christ.
4. All who die in infancy or are incompetent are saved.<sup>7</sup>

Although Sanders offers fair critiques of all these positions, he rides the fence too much when he simply concludes that “no position we have surveyed is free from serious difficulties.”<sup>8</sup>

Apparently for Sanders the position one takes must fit into a perfect, logical system that satisfies all the demands of human reason.

Millard Erickson, in his book *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus*, devotes a chapter to the topic of those who are “incapable of faith,” as he puts it.<sup>9</sup> In his survey of approaches Erickson observes that “Some take their primary inspiration from a particular understanding of sin and the human predicament, some from an understanding of the means of grace, some from the doctrine of God.”<sup>10</sup> For his own view, the very title of his chapter reveals that Erickson himself believes in an age of accountability, before which infants are not capable of belief.<sup>11</sup> Neither Sanders nor Erickson seem to be aware of the variety of Lutheran approaches as described in Appendix A.

There are a greater number of resources available when we turn our attention to books that discuss the more practical aspects of pregnancy loss. Dr. Thomas Moe’s *Pastoral Care in Pregnancy Loss: A Ministry Long Needed* is one of the most helpful resources for a pastoral

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>9</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 235-253.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 235.

perspective on this pregnancy loss. Moe writes from a pastoral perspective and gets to the heart of this issue. He includes several case studies in his research and points out a number of compelling reasons why pastoral care in pregnancy loss is a ministry pastors will not want to ignore. He provides many thought-provoking insights on how to serve those who suffer a pregnancy loss.

*Miscarriage: Women Sharing from the Heart* by Marie Allen and Shelly Marks is perhaps the best resource for understanding firsthand what pregnancy loss is like. The authors interviewed 100 women who had gone through a miscarriage and the personal stories they relate in this book provide valuable insights. Bruce Pierce's *Miscarriage and Stillbirth: the Changing Response* surveys the state of pregnancy loss treatment today, but at times he is too brief.<sup>12</sup> Elise Barrett provides many practical insights in *What Was Lost: A Christian Journey through Miscarriage* as she relates the story of her own and others' pregnancy loss.<sup>13</sup>

One little book that pastors may also find useful is *When Your Baby Dies through Miscarriage or Stillbirth*, by Louis Gamino and Ann Taylor Cooney.<sup>14</sup> The easy-to-read style and brief size of this book make it a quick reference for pastors which they may even consider handing out to those who are grieving. All of these books should be read critically as their authors come from a variety of Christian denominations, excluding this last source which was produced by *Thrivent Financial for Lutherans* (currently *Thrivent*).

There are numerous articles in journals and periodicals that deal with specific aspects of pregnancy loss, but two in particular serve as good introductions to the issue of pregnancy loss. Swanee Hunt's "Pastoral Care and Miscarriage: A Ministry Long Neglected" is intended to provide ministers with the medical and emotional information they need to better relate to women who go through pregnancy loss.<sup>15</sup> Even though Kathleen Lull Seaton writes on one specific form of pregnancy loss in her article "A Grief Unobserved: Caring for Families

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Pierce, *Miscarriage and stillbirth: the changing response* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Elise Barrett, *What Was Lost: A Christian Journey through Miscarriage* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Louis A. Gamino and Ann Taylor Cooney, *When Your Baby Dies through Miscarriage or Stillbirth* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Swanee Hunt, "Pastoral care and miscarriage: a ministry long neglected." *Pastoral Psychology* 32, no. 4 (June 1, 1984): 265-278.



Following Early Pregnancy Loss,” the observations she makes would apply to many other cases as well.<sup>16</sup>

Among web resources there are many blogs that touch on the issue of miscarriage. These are particularly useful in learning the personal stories of real people who went through pregnancy loss. Rachel Lewis, for example, has many interesting things to say as she compares natural pregnancy loss to abortion in a blog post entitled, “Why miscarriage matters when you’re pro-life.”<sup>17</sup> Donielle Baker’s post on “What You Should (And Shouldn’t) Say to Someone Who has Lost a Baby” contains one of the more comprehensive lists of what to say and what not to say at a pregnancy loss.<sup>18</sup> In an effort to learn more about pregnancy loss issues, the American Pregnancy Association website also provides various statistics and informative facts about pregnancy loss.<sup>19</sup>

### **3. Biblical Study**

As we begin to approach the issue of pregnancy loss on the basis of Scripture, our study will examine two primary issues. First, it will consider what Scripture says about the unborn in general and about pregnancy loss in particular, as well as what implications this has for the Christian’s attitude toward unborn children. Second, it will explore the comfort and hope God’s word has to offer as pastors minister to believers in pregnancy loss.

#### **3.1 The Value of Unborn Life in Scripture**

##### ***God Created and Cares for the Unborn***

Psalm 139:13-16 is one of the key places in Scripture to turn to when examining the value of unborn life. These verses provide perhaps the most convincing evidence that God not

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<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Lull Seaton, “A Grief Unobserved: Caring for Families Following Early Pregnancy Loss.” *Word & World*, no. 16.1 (Winter 1996): 38-44.

<sup>17</sup> Rachel Lewis, “Why miscarriage matters when you’re pro-life,” *The Lewis Note*, February 21, 2014, <http://thelewisnote.blogspot.com/2014/02/why-miscarriage-matters-if-youre-pro.html> (accessed November 9, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> This resource is Appendix D.

<sup>19</sup> This website is available at <http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-loss/> (accessed on December 2, 2014).

only created the unborn, but that he also cares for them. Psalm 139 as a whole illuminates our understanding of the precision and care God takes in creating and preserving every individual. David marvels at his infinite God, a God whose characteristics cannot be fathomed by anyone. From the start David marvels at a God who searches his every thought and action, even before he has thought or acted himself (vv1-4). He is a God whose omnipresence sustains David no matter where he is (vv5-12). As David considers God's all-encompassing care for him, he reaches back to the first moment of his existence. David exclaims that God does all these things because

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Ps 139:13-16)

These beautiful verses, however, do not just apply to David. They provide key insights into the creation of every human being. Even though the unbelieving world may look at conception and a child's development as a random, natural process, God, and thus also believers, recognize it first and foremost as the divine working it truly is. John Brug says: "Although [God] brings us into existence through the natural processes of conception and birth, he nevertheless remains fully in control of our creation. He maintains the processes and watches over us with personal care even before our births."<sup>20</sup> David acknowledges this personal touch when he uses such intimate language: "my inmost being...you knit me together...I am fearfully and wonderfully made...your eyes saw my unformed body." The everlasting God who took such care in creating a life has also been concerned from all eternity about what happens to that life (v16).

The value God ascribes to the unborn life he created is ultimately unfathomable by us. Yet this divine care and love is something Christians will also strive to adopt in regard to the unborn children God has given them. Right after expressing the wonderful truths of vv13-16 David bursts out, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" If the life of even an unborn child is counted among the precious thoughts of God, then believers will naturally also regard every unborn life as precious.

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<sup>20</sup> John F. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73-150* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 461.

Although Psalm 139 is perhaps the best place to refer to in examining the value of unborn life in the eyes of God and believers, there are many other places in Scripture that also teach this. Speaking of children in general, in Isaiah 43:1-7 God not only reminds the Israelites that he is their Creator and Protector (vv1-4), he is the same for their children as well: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (vv5-7). In Psalm 119:73 it says, “Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.” The creature will naturally want to obey the Creator, and this includes respecting what he respects. How could this leave out the unborn? And in Psalm 71:6 the psalmist says “For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother’s womb. I will ever praise you.”<sup>21</sup>

### ***Life from the Moment of Conception***

If anyone should argue that unborn children do not count as real human lives until they are fully developed, believers can point to the scriptural evidence that all human life begins at the moment of conception. Psalm 139:13-16 again serves as one of the most convincing proofs of this, as John Brug comments on v16: “גִּלְמִי refers to the embryo or fetus before it is fully developed. Even then the child is a person who is cared for by God.”<sup>22</sup> Note also in these verses how David takes for granted his own personhood at conception. David does not distinguish between himself in the present and himself at conception. David does not indicate a certain point after God’s creation of him at which he then becomes a person with rights just like any other person. He is the same person and the same life, but like all people he is simply a person at different points in his life.

It is also noteworthy that at least several times in Scripture conception and birth are mentioned side by side (Ge 4:1-2; 21:2; 30:23; 1 Sa 1:20; Isa 46:3). If all that mattered were the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. also the personal language God uses in Eze 16:20-21 to refer to the children of idolatrous Israelites who sacrificed their children: “And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore *to me* and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered *my* children and sacrificed them to the idols.” Emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup> Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73-150*, 461.

“final product,” i.e., the child that is eventually born at the *end* of a pregnancy, then the mention of conceiving would be unnecessary. As it concerns the sanctity of human life God does not distinguish between the embryo formed at conception and the child that is later born.

Another interesting event in Scripture related to this is the angel of the LORD visiting Manoah’s wife. Judges 13:4-5 describes how the angel of the Lord informed Samson’s mother that she will have a child: “Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son.” The Lord considered this child to be “dedicated to God from the womb” (vv5, 7). This command would seem strange unless we realize that from the moment of conception God considered Samson to be a real, living human being. The expectations that God would later demand from Samson after birth were already applied to him before birth at the moment of conception.

But perhaps the strongest evidence that life begins at conception is the truth that sin also begins at conception, as Psalm 51:5 clearly teaches: “Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” David wrote this psalm as a confession of his sin after committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah. David understood that he had sinned against the Lord (2 Sa 12:13), and even stresses how his sin was *primarily* against God (v4). As David continues, this offense against God is not only a result of his sinful actions—it is a result of his sinful nature, a nature which he has had from the moment of conception. God would not hold someone accountable for sin unless they were truly a person with a soul. David and all people are not only corrupted with sin by nature, but this corruption took place the very instant they come into existence.

This evidence that life begins at conception also demonstrates that from the moment of conception the unborn are also on the same level as all other people in terms of the sanctity of and right to life. In commenting on Solomon’s comparison of a man who lived a long life but received no proper burial with a stillborn child in Ecclesiastes 6:3-6, James Bollhagen states that “it is remarkable how Solomon talks about the miscarried or stillborn fetus (baby) as a fully human person, even as better off than a wealthy man... After reading Solomon’s description, one can understand that Solomon is comparing two equals in terms of their stature as human creatures. The comparison is not drawn between a ‘he’ and an impersonal ‘it.’ ”<sup>23</sup> Dr. John

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<sup>23</sup> James Bollhagen, *Concordia Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 220-221.

Warwick Montgomery also defends the personhood of the unborn on the basis of who created him rather than on what he himself is or does when he says:

Man is not man because of what he does or accomplishes. He is man because God made him...Moreover, the Bible regards personal identity as beginning with conception, and one's involvement in the sinful human situation as commencing at that very point: "Behold I (not 'it') was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me (not 'it')." For the Biblical writers personhood in the most genuine sense begins no later than conception; subsequent human acts illustrate this personhood, they do not create it. Man does because he is (not the reverse) and he is because God brought about his psycho-physical existence in the miracle of conception.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The Unborn Are a Blessing from God***

We have already seen that the unborn are children. Not only do unborn children have real life that deserves real respect, in Scripture they are called *blessings* from God. Granted, some passages (e.g., Psalm 128) call children blessings in terms of the joy they bring after birth. But overall there is no compelling reason to look at the biblical evidence as a whole and conclude, "Scripture never includes the unborn when it calls children a blessing."

In contrast to the burdensome way children are often portrayed in our culture,<sup>25</sup> Scripture describes children as follows: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate" (Ps 127:3-5). Even grandparents take part in the blessed joy of children, as Proverbs 17:6 says, "Children's children are a crown to the aged." As Jacob blessed his son Joseph he specifically mentioned the blessing of unborn life: "But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber...because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with...blessings of the breast and womb" (Ge 49:24-25).

God also specifically calls the ability to become pregnant and bear children a blessing. One simply has to note the occurrences in Scripture to "the fruit of the womb," such as in Dt 7:13. The blessing of fertility and childbearing is not an assumed right which believers can take for granted—God alone can grant this privilege. God is the one who opens or closes the womb at

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Kenneth A. Strack, "Abortion in the light of Scripture," 3-4, available at WLS Online Essay File, <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1851> (accessed November 8, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73-150*, 407.

will. The ability to conceive is a blessing from the God who gave the power to procreate along with his command to be fruitful and multiply (Ge 1:28; Ge 4:1).

One of the more powerful proofs that children are a divine blessing is that their arrival into this world can take possibly the worst pain imaginable – childbirth (cf. Ge 3:16) – and make it all worthwhile. Jesus himself used this picture to comfort his disciples’ grief at his departure when he says in John 16:20-22: “You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.” Should not this same anticipation of joy fill the hearts of believers as they await the birth of their unborn child?<sup>26</sup>

### ***The Unborn Are Redeemed by God***

Since it has already been shown that the unborn are conceived in sin, it is also important to understand that God did not exclude the unborn in his plan of salvation. They too are souls for whom Christ died. They belong to the world that God was reconciling to himself in Christ (2 Co 5:19). Just as much as they are included in Romans 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned,” so also are they included in Romans 5:15 “For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”

### ***Our Lord Jesus Christ Was Once Unborn***

In this connection it is a true blessing from God to ponder who exactly it was who redeemed the unborn – the once unborn incarnate God himself. That the life of the unborn deserves appreciation is also demonstrated well by those familiar words: “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born...” (Lk 2:6). Though they are recited by Christian children around the world every Christmas, these words probably do not grab our attention as much as the rest of that famous chapter. However, just as God’s creation of every person did not ignore the slightest of details (Ps 139:13-16), so also God’s plan of salvation for every person did not neglect the slightest of details. Christ shared in our humanity – all of it – to destroy the work of the devil (Heb 2:14). When Christians consider that “the Word became flesh and made his

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Isaiah 66:7-11 for another example of using childbirth to depict joy.

dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14), they will not want to lose sight of the fact that he first made his dwelling among us as an unborn child in Mary’s womb, just as the angel of the Lord comforted Joseph, “do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:20). David Scaer makes an interesting observation in this regard: “The Son of God became a human being at his conception, not at his birth. Theologically and liturgically, the Annunciation (March 25), which celebrates the conception of the Son of God, takes precedence over Christmas (December 25), the commemoration of his birth.”<sup>27</sup> The life of Christ in the womb urges Christians to see the value of unborn life. This truth about Christ is so worthy of our attention that we acknowledge it often in the Nicene Creed, “he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.”

Even before his miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit this truth was foretold. In an indirect sense it was already hinted at in Genesis 3:15 with the use of the word “seed.” From the seed enclosed within the woman would come the one who would crush the serpent’s head. In the Messianic Psalm 22, the pre-incarnate Lord expresses his confidence in his Father in the midst of his suffering: “Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God” (22:9-10). Years later Isaiah would prophesy about the coming Messiah when the Lord’s Servant would say, “Before I was born the LORD called me, from my birth he has made mention of my name...And now the Lord says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself” (49:1,5).<sup>28</sup> The second greatest theologian of the Lutheran church, Martin Chemnitz, expounds the significance of this truth for believers:

This teaching [the hypostatic union] is not idle sophistry, for it is an article of faith that Mary did not beget a man in whom God dwelt. Rather she bore the only Son of God by receiving His flesh, as Augustine says, “He was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary who for this reason and in this sense is correctly called the God-bearer (Theotochos).” If reverently considered, this act produces the most comforting thoughts. For the Son of God embraced the human race with such great love that He did not shrink from descending to such a humble state that He not only did not assume a man who was already formed and born, but rather He united to Himself personally an individual human

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<sup>27</sup> David P. Scaer, “Abortion, Incarnation and the Place of Children in the Church: All One Cloth.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 77, no. 3-4 (July/October 2013): 224.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 289, 293, who says: “From the first instant of his human existence the Servant existed to do the will of God.”

body in the very moment of its conception and made it His own. Thus the Son of God in assuming His own flesh, but without sin, also endured those things which commonly befall man in conception, pregnancy, and birth (as the fathers of the Council of Ephesus said), so that from His very beginning, rise, and, as it were, root, He might first restore in Himself our depraved nature and so cleanse and sanctify our contaminated conception and birth that we might know that Christ's salvation applies even to man's fetus in conception, gestation, and birth.<sup>29</sup>

The implications of these truths for our purpose in framing the Christian's attitude toward unborn life are clear. Christ did not consider it beneath himself to become not just a baby, but even a single cell living within his mother. In humility and with a servant's heart he lowered himself to become a man in every way – except for sin – even within the womb.<sup>30</sup> As Charles Gieschen observes, Christ's “nine-month residence in the womb, therefore, is as important for our salvation as his three-day rest in the tomb... That the Son ‘became flesh’ and entered this world as a tiny child in the womb of his mother trumpets out the value of each child from the moment that the miracle of life begins.”<sup>31</sup>

### ***Jesus Loves Little Children, Including the Unborn***

The incarnate God who himself was once unborn also expressed his love for little children, including the unborn. Jesus took a little child in his arms as he told his disciples that welcoming this little child in his name is to welcome Jesus himself (Mk 9:36-37; Lk 9:47-48). Jesus' concern for them was so great it led him to say that anyone who would dare to cause “one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Mt 18:6). Christ longs to have the little children brought to him. He calls out to them and warns others against preventing them from being brought to him, “for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14).

Now it is true that nowhere in Scripture does Jesus make explicit reference to the unborn in this regard. But even though Jesus is referring to children who are already born in Matthew 18-19, it is interesting that Luke (18:15-17) uses the word *βρέφη* to describe the little ones being

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*. Trans. J.A.O. Preus, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 102.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Philippians 2:6-8 and Hebrews 4:15.

<sup>31</sup> Charles A. Gieschen, “The Value of Children according to the Gospels.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 77, no. 3-4 (July/October 2013): 199.



brought to Jesus. Luke also uses this term to describe not only the newborn baby Jesus (Lk 2:12, 16), but also the yet unborn John the Baptist as he resided in his mother Elizabeth's womb (1:41, 44).<sup>32</sup> We do not want to overlook here one of those "small" yet impactful wonders recorded for us in Scripture: the presence and news of one unborn child who was only months old (Jesus) so filled another unborn child (John) with the Holy Spirit that he jumped for joy in his mother's womb (Lk 1:39-45).

### ***The Love of Parents for Their Children***

All of these biblical proofs for the value of unborn life have been building up to one grand conclusion: the value and worth that Scripture ascribes to unborn life compels all Christians, but especially Christian parents, to also love their children from the moment of conception. As believers read Scripture they have before themselves the wonderful example of parental love found in the Scriptures, "which are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Ti 3:16). For it is the relationship of father and son, the language of parenthood and childhood, which God has given us in order to help us even begin to comprehend explaining the relationship between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Persons of the Trinity. Consider how the Father chose to express the love he had for David's promised descendant: "I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor" (1 Chr 17:13; cf. 2 Sa 7:14), as well as his glorious revelation at Christ's baptism and on the mount of Transfiguration, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 17:5; 2 Pe 1:17).<sup>33</sup> This specific designation as Son belongs only to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity,<sup>34</sup> and Jesus himself often spoke of his unique, loving relationship with his Father (Jn 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; 17:24).

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Concordia Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:50*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 72-73. Just says: The biblical usage of this term has important ramifications for human-life issues. It supports—even mandates—a concern for the sanctity of life from conception onward and makes disregard for such life morally reprehensible," 72.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Mt 12:17-18; Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Hebrews 1:1-5. On this Lawrence O. Richards has this to say: "Jesus used the term 'Father,' carefully. He spoke of 'my Father,' and to the disciples he referred to God as 'your Father.' He never used the phrase 'our Father' in a way that would link himself with them: the relationship of Jesus with God is unique, for he is the eternal Son of God." *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1985), 269. This need not be an absolute rule, however, as one could counter that Jesus did indeed link himself with his disciples when he taught them how to pray to their Father, Mt 6:9-13.

Scripture often uses this imagery to portray the relationship between God and believers: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him” (Ps 103:13). This loving relationship between God and believers is only possible because of Christ: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:26-27). John cannot contain his excitement as he exclaims “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 Jn 3:1)<sup>35</sup>

In fact, God’s relationship with believers transcends our deepest understanding of parental love:

Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the LORD has forgotten me.” Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” (Isa 49:13-16)

David expresses the same confidence in Psalm 27:10 when he says that “Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.”

This leads us to ask the question, “Why did God choose *this* relationship and *this* language to describe his love and relationship with believers?” Of all the human experiences God uses to describe his most-intimate relationship within the persons of the Trinity as well as his relationship with those who are his own through faith in his Son—of everything that could have been said, the first person of the Trinity calls himself the Father, Jesus his Son, and us his dearly loved children. But why?

One possible answer to this question was articulated by a 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran pastor, Sigismund Scherertz, who himself lost seven children (ranging from 6 months to 17 years old) to the plague in only half a year in 1626. Some years later he wrote a book of consolation for parents grieving the loss of their children. In the first meditation of his *Handbook for Mourning Parents* he wrote about the idea of parental love (*Elternliebe*): “It was not without reason that in the first creation the dear God implanted in parents natural love toward their children, so that we

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<sup>35</sup> Some of Jesus’ most beautiful and comforting sayings describe God as our Father: Mt 6:26, 32 and Lk 12:30; Mt 10:29.

would all the better learn to know his love toward his dear Son, whom he gave for us (Ro 8), as well as the love he has toward us.”<sup>36</sup> Alexander Bitzel elaborates on this:

As Scherertz explains, God implanted in the first human couple love for their children, so that when the descendants of the first parents recognize in faith that God gave his beloved Son into death for the redemption of men, they can understand God’s love for his Son, and through this the unending love of God for man. Consequently, the love of parents for their children serves this purpose: to make God’s love for man comprehensible.<sup>37</sup>

The children God gives to us are a reminder of how much he loves us, his own children. Those who are led by the Spirit and adopted into sonship by the Spirit are also convinced by the Spirit that they are God’s children (Ro 8:14-16). In his mercy God reveals that the benefits of this sonship are so great that “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Ro 8:32) We hear that God loves us so much he was willing to sacrifice his own, dearly beloved Son, and we see what his love for us as his children truly means.<sup>38</sup> The best way we can understand how God wants us to love our children is to see how much he loves his Son, and at the same time to marvel at just how much God must also love us in his Son whom he gave for us. That is the love God has hardwired into every parent. Through sin parents may resist this natural inclination to love their children, but God will always be the Father of those who believe in his Son.

All of this is relevant to our discussion about the value of unborn life because it shows how God considers this relationship between parents and children to be a special one, since he uses it so powerfully and extensively in Scripture. This truth overwhelmingly appeals to parents to cherish the love God has for them as his children through faith in his Son, and therefore also to love the children he has blessed them with. Just as the Father regards his relationship with his Son and with us as dear and precious to himself, so also, by virtue of this relationship, God views the relationship between parents and their children as something sacred and special. If Christians are called to love as he first loved us (1 Jn 4:19), then believing parents will naturally love their

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Alexander Bitzel, *Anfechtung und Trost bei Sigismund Scherertz: Ein lutherischer Theologe im Dreissigjährigen Krieg* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 233. All translations from German and Latin sources in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 269, says “Only in seeing God as Father do we begin to realize the intimacy of the relationship that can exist between the believer and the Lord.”

children. They will love their children as soon as they are their children, from their first existence within the womb.

Since God in his word is not silent about unborn children, Christians will not be silent about them either. Many Christians will confess their value of unborn life without hesitation, but as will be demonstrated later, this confession is not always followed up with consistent practice. If believers are going to have any chance of understanding and coping with what has happened in the *death* of their child, they will first need to understand and appreciate the *life* of their child, no matter how young he or she was. That is why we have gone to what may seem like exhaustive lengths to demonstrate the value of unborn life on the basis of Scripture.

This biblical study of unborn life will also enable the pastor to adopt the proper attitude as he ministers to believers who have lost a child in pregnancy. It will give him the proper biblical perspective on these issues and not lead him to shrug off such suffering as minor or inconsequential to the lives of his people. It will also help him understand some Christians who meditate on these truths and take them to heart feel the loss of their child so very deeply. They understand that they have lost a real life, their real child.

### ***The Tragedy of Losing Children***

In view of how precious the life of children, including unborn, is to God and believers, it is no wonder that the death of children ranks among the greatest tragedies recorded in Scripture. Throughout God's word one finds the sad theme of barrenness and infertility coupled with pain and anguish.<sup>39</sup> This is another form of pregnancy loss that ought not to be ignored. In addition, at the death of young children in Scripture there is great mourning and weeping (Mk 5:38), and parents long to have God save their dying or already dead children (1 Ki 17:7-24; 2 Ki 4:8-37; Mk 5:22-23).

Therefore, it is natural that miscarriage and stillbirth are also considered a great tragedy in the Bible. The words of Solomon (Ecc 6:3-5), Job (3:11-16; 10:18-19), and Jeremiah (20:13-18), which might seem to put a positive spin on stillbirth, are not intended to be comforting gospel. Rather, they are general observations on the way of life (Solomon) or the words of men

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. the stories of Sarah (Ge 16; 18:1-15; 21:1-7), Rebekah (Ge 25:19-23), Rachel (Ge 30:1-24), Samson's mother (Jdg 13), Hannah (1 Sa 1), Michal (2 Sa 6:23), and Elizabeth (Lk 1).

in dire straits (Job and Jeremiah).<sup>40</sup> In fact Scripture portrays pregnancy loss as quite terrible, at times even connected with divine curses. Miriam's punishment of leprosy after opposing Moses is compared to a stillborn infant in Numbers 12:10-12. The prophet Hosea speaks of "giving them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry" (9:14).

One special passage in Scripture is the debated verses of Exodus 21:22-25. In brief, there is debate over whether 21:22 addresses the situation in which a woman who is struck miscarries or whether she gives birth prematurely. For whichever crime this is, the text says that if there is no serious injury, the penalty is only a fine. Exodus 21:23-25, however, state that if there is serious injury, "you are to take life for life." Some have used the miscarriage interpretation in an attempt to prove that God clearly does not value the life of the unborn, since he attaches only a penalty of a fine in the case of a miscarriage, but that of death if the mother is more seriously injured. If one follows the premature birth view, it can be taken as support that God does value unborn life in that the penalty for taking it, even accidentally, was the punishment of death. For our purposes here it is enough to admit that this is not an easy question to resolve.<sup>41</sup> However one settles this debate, the biblical evidence examined above still overwhelmingly supports the biblical position of value for unborn life.

### **3.2 Biblical Comfort and Hope for Christians in Pregnancy Loss**

When the grief and pain of pregnancy loss fall upon believers whom God has called pastors to serve, the challenge of knowing what to say and how to say it can seem overwhelming. However, this tragedy is also one of the very reasons why God has called pastors, to be his servants who proclaim the word of our God who binds up the brokenhearted (Ps 147:3). For this reason our approach in counseling and comforting believers will be rooted in the word God has given to us.

Furthermore, as we search the Scriptures to discover what hope and comfort we may bring to hearts hurting from miscarriage and stillbirth, we imitate the pastoral heart of Luther,

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<sup>40</sup> Job was still reeling from the loss of his children and an unhelpful wife (Job 1-2), and a comparison of all of Jeremiah's words in 20:7-18 words reveal that the prophet was not having the stablest of days.

<sup>41</sup> For a premature birth interpretation, cf. H. Wayne House, "Miscarriage or Premature Birth: Additional Thoughts on Exodus 21:22-25." *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (Fall 1978): 108-123. For a miscarriage interpretation, cf. Russel Fuller, "Exodus 21:22-23: The Miscarriage Interpretation and the Personhood of the Fetus." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 2 (June 1994): 169-184.

who himself experienced pregnancy loss when his wife Katy suffered a miscarriage in 1540. Like Luther in his classic statement on this issue, *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage*, we differentiate between those who lose their child at no fault of their own and those who deliberately do so. In his introduction to this writing translator James Raun notes that Luther is addressing grieving mothers: “It is just such a person that Luther has in mind, not the sophomoric, speculative thinker.”<sup>42</sup>

### ***Silence of Scripture***

Yet in searching what comfort Scripture has to offer those who have lost a child in pregnancy, we are right away confronted with a serious difficulty. Millard Erickson points out that there are over a thousand references to “child” or “children” in Scripture, but not one of them explicitly reveals the fate of infants dying in infancy.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the Lutheran approach to this important question and all that it entails for ministry to the bereaved must be careful not to go beyond what God has revealed in his sacred word. As John Schuetze notes, God has not provided a means of grace for the unborn as he has for the born in the sacraments and in the word of God.<sup>44</sup> Because of this some Lutherans have said that this is a matter best left up to God’s hidden will.<sup>45</sup>

### ***John the Baptist and Infant Faith***

However, this does not mean we cannot search the Scriptures to see if there may be any evidence for infant faith before birth. The first passage to come to mind in this regard is often the case of John the Baptist in Elizabeth’s womb (Lk 1:39-45). Here we do have definite proof from Scripture that children, even unborn children, can believe. This in itself is cause for great rejoicing as we know that nothing is impossible for our God, who can transcend even the most impossible of obstacles. It is clear that John had faith when Elizabeth states that this baby “jumped for joy” at hearing the mother of his Savior speak.

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<sup>42</sup> Martin Luther, “Comfort for Women who Have Had a Miscarriage, 1542,” In *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, Volume 43, *Devotional Writings II*, ed. Gustav K. Wiencke. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 245.

<sup>43</sup> Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?* 236.

<sup>44</sup> John D. Schuetze, “Pastoral theology brief: comfort for parents grieving a miscarriage or stillbirth--following Luther's lead.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (March 1, 2006): 116.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Appendix A.

At the same time we need to decide if this passage is prescriptive or descriptive, i.e., if this is only an example of what God *can* do or if this is a promise of what God *will* do. As Schuetze points out, here we want to keep in mind what the angel Gabriel had earlier said to his father Zechariah concerning this child, that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (Lk 1:15).<sup>46</sup> Since the Holy Spirit has not made any such predictions about our or any others' children, this passage is best taken as descriptive.

As a descriptive passage, then, is this example and the broader teaching of the power of the external word to work supernaturally one that we will want to employ in cases of pregnancy loss? Some Lutherans take this approach in offering comfort for pregnancy loss, and it may even be a predominant view among American Lutherans.<sup>47</sup> One pastor who was interviewed emphasized this as the only tool which pastors have to use in these situations, but he added, "What a great tool it is." He emphasized that this does not mean we declare with absolute certainty that the word has created faith in an unborn child's heart, but there is no reason not to give unborn children the best chance possible by encouraging their mothers to be around the word of God as often as possible.

With an emphasis on the supernatural power of the word, we do not also want to forget that the word works psychologically.<sup>48</sup> In baptism it is the word which gives the sacrament the power to convert a child that has no use of reason. Therefore it is not the word that is powerless, but the word must not be divorced from its proper use. And whenever we see the word in its proper use in Scripture, it is a word understood, for it is a human word. As LCMS pastor Karl Hess also points out, the effort we put into translating the Scriptures would be undermined if the word worked on those who did not understand the language it was spoken in.<sup>49</sup>

There is a further complication for comforting parents who have gone through the most common type of pregnancy loss, an early miscarriage within the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester. In our age of advanced technology we are able to learn more about the human body and how it develops in the womb than ever before. This has allowed us to even pinpoint the time in pregnancy when certain

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<sup>46</sup> Schuetze, "Pastoral Theology Brief," 116.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Appendix A.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Volume IV (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 13-15.

<sup>49</sup> Karl R. Hess, "The Faith of Unbaptized Infants in Bugenhagen's *On Unborn Children*." *Logia* 23, no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 32.

parts of the human body first are fully developed. According to the best estimate, infants do not have fully developed ears until between 16-18 weeks.<sup>50</sup> Sound is also muffled and it seems that infants, though they can recognize language and tones, are not able to hear clearly. The problem this presents the argument for the word heard in the womb is clear. It would be one thing to say that infants who do not *understand* the word may be saved by it, but it would be another to tell parents that their child who had not yet developed the ability to *hear* could somehow have been saved by what he or she cannot even hear. This would border upon using the word of God almost like a magic wand.<sup>51</sup>

The point in all this is not to say that there is no way the Spirit could work through the word on an unborn infant. We have John the Baptist as evidence that he certainly can, and even without this evidence we would not doubt our God could accomplish this, for “nothing is impossible with God” (Lk 1:37). But as Schuetze points out, “the way the Word works on the unborn raises more questions than it answers.”<sup>52</sup> Because of this we may point parents to the possibility that the word alone has the power to change a child’s heart, but Scripture simply does not reveal how the word works ordinarily on infants. Even though it can certainly bring parents comfort to dwell on these things, there is still a degree of uncertainty with this approach.<sup>53</sup> If Lutheran pastors have more solid ground for speaking with confidence, that is where Lutheran pastors will want to turn and direct believers lost in grief and pain.

### ***“I Will Be Their God”***

One of those places in Scripture that pastors will also want to take time to ponder is Genesis 17, the covenant of circumcision which God established with Abraham. In this covenant God first presents his part: he makes the promise that Abram will be the father of many nations, even changing his name to Abraham, “father of many” (v5). After promising Abraham that nations and kings would come from him, God continues: “I will establish my covenant as an

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<sup>50</sup> The American Pregnancy Association website, <http://americanpregnancy.org/week-by-week/17-weeks-pregnant/> (accessed November 12, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Adolf Hoenecke, IV, 15. “On the basis of Scripture and with our dogmaticians, we reject every view of the working of Scripture, or of the Word of God, that makes it work like a magic charm, like a medicine, magically or mechanically and physically.”

<sup>52</sup> Schuetze, “Pastoral Theology Brief,” 117.

<sup>53</sup> Hess, “The Faith of Unbaptized Infants,” 32.



everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants (עַרְבֶיךָ, “your seed”) after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (vv7-8). This promise to be the God of Abraham and the God of his descendants is one that is repeated throughout Scripture.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to notice here that God is speaking not only to Abraham, but to all who would come from him. Already from God’s first call to him in Genesis 12:1-3 this had been an integral part of God’s promises to Abraham, and we understand God included them in Scripture for the benefit of all people. The promise and comfort Abraham receives in Genesis 17 extends to include his descendants.

Yet God is not making a promise only to his physical descendants. In fact, blood is not what counts—faith is. As those enlightened by God’s grace in the New Testament, we understand that those who are children of Abraham through faith are those who have this promise applied to them, as Romans 4:11-12, 16-17

So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.<sup>55</sup>

Peter made a similar point on Pentecost when he declared “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Ac 2:39). This means, then, that the promise given in Genesis 17:7 applies to all believers. They are heirs and recipients of the promises made to Abraham, including this promise here. And that promise was made not just to them, but to their children, their *seed*.

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. 2 Sa 7:23ff; 1 Chr 17:22; Jer 24:7, 30:9, 31:33, 32:38; Eze 11:20, 14:11, 28:26, 34:24, 30, 37:23, 27, 39:22, 28; Zec 8:8, 9:16, 10:6, 12:5; 2 Co 6:16, Heb 8:10, 11:16, Rev 21:3, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. also Romans 9:6-9.

As we continue in Genesis 17 we see with the words “As for you” in v9 that God also expected something from Abraham. And just as above, we understand that this expectation of Abraham is the expectation of every heir to the promises made to Abraham. God said to Abraham: “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants (אֲנִי וְאַתָּה) after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you: Every male after you shall be circumcised.” It was God’s will that his promise to Abraham and his seed would be applied to them through this seal of circumcision. In connection with this God also stipulated that “Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (v14). It is clear that God did not consider circumcision to be something which Israel could arbitrarily decide they did not need and still expect to enjoy God’s promises. In connection with infants who died before receiving circumcision, Luther says:

This statement, as we have also pointed out above, does not involve infants who died before the eighth day. Even though they have original sin, a merciful God will nevertheless find a way to deliver them, just as He does with other sinners. But so far as this threat is concerned, they are delivered from it, because they have committed no sin against the law of circumcision. There remains in them the guilt of birth or of original sin and no guilt so far as circumcision is concerned.<sup>56</sup>

In our New Testament era it is baptism that has replaced the covenant of circumcision. There are clearly differences between circumcision and baptism, e.g., that baptism has no set commanded timetable for its administration and that females are not excluded from sacrament of baptism, but ultimately both have been ways God has ordained for his people to gain access to him and receive the blessings he has promised. The parallelism is particularly significant here in their application for infants. Both point to Christ’s work, but while “circumcision pointed *forward* to Christ’s future work, water baptism points *back* to Christ’s finished work.”<sup>57</sup> Both circumcision and baptism were commanded by God (Ge 17:10; Mt 28:18-20), but they were also expressions of God’s love, the seal of his grace toward them as given in his promises.

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: American Edition*, Volume 3, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 143-144.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew A. Das, *Baptized into God’s Family: The Doctrine of Infant Baptism for Today*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 69, emphasis original. Cf. also Jack D. Kilcrease, III, “The Salvation of the Unbaptized in Gerhard and Chemnitz,” *Logia* 16, no. 4 (January 1, 2007): 30.

All of this helps us understand who our God is, that he is a God of promises and a God who keeps his promises. In Genesis 17:7 God has made a promise regarding the children of believers. He has made a promise to believers concerning their seed, their children, and clearly this includes their children within the womb. On this point the Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard says: “That we also have no occasion to doubt the gracious will of God in such a situation [the death of an unbaptized child], He has clearly shown by His promise in Gen. 17:7. He wants to be our God and the God of our seed. The word ‘seed’ is to be especially noted, since it includes also the little children who are still enclosed in their mother’s womb.”<sup>58</sup> God expects believers to apply his promises regarding their children through the means he has established, and in our case that is baptism. But when he takes little children before they have the chance to be received into his family in the way he has ordained, we understand God has made a promise to them, and we count on him to keep that promise. Neither parents nor children have rejected or despised God’s command and covenant. It is quite clear from Genesis 17 that even though God has bound us to the sacraments, he has not bound himself.

In this connection it is conceded that God has not made any explicit statements about children who die before receiving baptism. But that does not absolutely cancel out our ability to make sound inferences when looking at all of Scripture. For example, Scripture never explicitly says, “God is triune,” but throughout Scripture we receive the certainty that God is three-in-one, and it is not up to us to explain how this can be. Scripture never explicitly says, “Baptize infants,” but we understand from several scriptural inferences that babies are by nature sinful and in need of what God offers in baptism, and that they too are included in Christ’s command to baptize all nations. In a similar way as we do not have any declarations from God that say “This is what happens to unbaptized infants,” yet we can make inferences from all that Scripture says. Here, then, is another case where we make inferences based on solid scriptural evidence found in Genesis 17 and elsewhere.

This interpretation is one which Lutherans have adopted for many years. A Lutheran pastor of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Eberhard Bidembach, gave the following answer to the question

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<sup>58</sup> Johann Gerhard, *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (1610)* (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2000), 174.

“Whether the children of Christians, whom a premature death excludes from the sacrament of baptism, may be saved”:

In this matter I would certainly dare to establish nothing other than what I judge we are sufficiently taught in Scripture regarding the salvation of those children. For I am certainly persuaded that that sweetest consolation which was given to Abraham in Genesis 17 is ours, that “I am your God and the God of your seed.” For if we believe Paul, all who give their name to Christ are children of Abraham.<sup>59</sup>

The Lutheran reformer Johann Brenz also demonstrates how this promise applies to all believers even today:

But the Christian has a clear, explicit promise of God regarding his children. In Genesis 17 God says to Abraham, “I am your God, and [the God] of your seed after you.” Now every Christian house father is a co-sharer with Abraham, since these people who have Abraham’s faith, even if they are from the Jews or Turks, are truly related to Abraham, as Paul teaches in Romans 4 and 9. Therefore, as God promised Abraham that he would recognize his children also as his people and church, and be their gracious Lord and God, so he promises every single Christian house father that he wants to be gracious and merciful to his children as well.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the Lutheran theologian and co-author of the Formula of Concord, Martin Chemnitz, provides a concise and comforting summary of this view in his *Enchiridion* as he answers the question “Are, then, the children of believers who die before birth or in birth damned?”

By no means, but since our children, brought to the light by divine blessing, are, as it were, given into our hands and at the same time means are offered, or it is made possible for the seal of the covenant of grace to be applied to them, there indeed that very solemn divine statement applies: The man-child, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, his soul shall be blotted out from [his] people (Ge 17:14). Hence the Lord met Moses on the way and wanted to kill him, because he had neglected to circumcise [his] son (Ex 4:24-26). But when those means are not given us—as when in the Old Testament a male died before the eighth day of circumcision—likewise when they, who, born in the desert in the interval of 40 years, could not be circumcised because

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<sup>59</sup> Eberhard Bidembach, “Utrum Christianorum liberi, quos mors praematura a Baptismi Sacramento exclusit, salvi fiant?” cited in Georg Dedeken, *Thesauri Consiliorum et Decisionum Volumen Primum* (Hamburg: Zacharias Hertel, 1671), 439.

<sup>60</sup> Johann Brenz, “Von der H. Tauffe / und der Christen ungetaufften Kindern,” cited in Dedeken, *Thesauri Consiliorum et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 437.

of daily harassment by enemies and constant wanderings, died uncircumcised, Jos 5:5-6, and when today infants die before they are born—in such cases the grace of God is not bound to the Sacraments, but those infants are to be brought and commended to Christ in prayers. And one should not doubt that those prayers are heard, for they are made in the name of Christ, Jn 16:23; Ge 17:7; Mt 19:14. Since, then, we cannot bring infants as yet unborn to Christ through Baptism, therefore we should do it through pious prayers. Parents are to be put in mind of this, and if perhaps such a case should occur, they are to be encouraged with this comfort.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Christ's Promise about Little Children and the Power of Prayer***

As Chemnitz alludes to at the end of this quote, there is another biblical comfort pastors can bring to grieving believers who have lost a child during pregnancy: the power of prayers for their children which are made in the name of Christ. Jesus demonstrates in Mark 10:13-16 just how highly he regards little children:

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Here we have the words of Christ himself regarding the little children of believers. Jesus is not talking about all children everywhere, for he says, “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”<sup>62</sup> These words not only show that Christ wants children to be brought to him, but they are also a promise that those children who are brought to him will be received. As Karl Hess maintains in an article on Johann Bugenhagen and the faith of unbaptized infants, infants have the word of God in two ways. They have the word which Jesus has spoken about them, saying that the kingdom of God belongs to them, and they also have the word actually spoken to them and applied to them in baptism. Yet when believing parents are not able to bring their children to Christ in baptism, they have the God-given privilege of bringing their children to Christ who has promised he will give them faith of their own.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works, Enchiridion—The Lord's Supper—The Lord's Prayer, Volume 5*. Trans. Luther Poellot, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 119.

<sup>62</sup> Das, *Baptized into God's Family*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> Hess, “The Faith of Unbaptized Infants,” 36.

Luther emphasized his belief in the power of intercessory prayer in his *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage*: “God intends that his promise and our prayer or yearning which is grounded in that promise should not be disdained or rejected, but highly valued and esteemed. I have said it before and preached it often enough: God accomplishes much through the faith and longing of another, even a stranger, even though there is still no personal faith.”<sup>64</sup>

Bugenhagen sums up this whole matter of Christ’s promise regarding the children of believers and the power of prayer:

We have two strong promises of Christ, who does not go back on his word to us, which we can believe firmly. One is that he has called us to pray in his name and graciously promised a hearing, and has sworn, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everything that you will ask the Father in my name will certainly happen” in John 16 and often in other places. The second is about the little children: “Let them come to me.” Here we Christians should realize that whether we carry the little children to Christ in baptism or with our prayers, we bear them to Christ in person now, at the present time. And he also now at the present time takes them up.”<sup>65</sup>

Bugenhagen also offers an example of what such intercessory prayer might look like, though he recognizes the prayer could be said in other words:

Yes, I say more still on the basis of this same promise of Christ, that the parents or others who are there may and should commend the little child with thanksgiving to Christ while it is still in the womb. They should bring or offer the child to Christ with this or similar prayers: “I thank you, dear heavenly Father, that you have blessed us with the fruit of the womb. Dear Lord Jesus Christ, let this little child be yours, as you have said: ‘Let the little children come to me, and forbid them not, because of such is the kingdom of God.’ Upon this your promise we bring this little child to you with our prayer. If it will be born and come into our hands, we will gladly also bring and carry it to you in baptism.”<sup>66</sup>

Now there may be cases where a mother did not even know she was pregnant until she miscarried. Or there may be instances where believing parents, for whatever reason, may not have prayed for their children. If in the latter case parents are burdened with guilt for not

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<sup>64</sup> Luther, “Comfort for Women Who have Had a Miscarriage,” 250. After his wife Katy suffered a miscarriage, Luther likewise claimed that it was the power of prayer which enabled her to recover and return to her household responsibilities. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1523-1546, Volume 3*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 235.

<sup>65</sup> Hess, “The Faith of Unbaptized Infants,” 38.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

praying, possibly even blaming their neglect of prayer for what happened, pastors can remind them of Christ's forgiveness for all sins, including the neglect of prayer. Furthermore, they can be assured that Christ has heard the prayer of the church made on behalf of all unborn children.<sup>67</sup> In such situations Luther looked to Romans 8:26-27 and Ephesians 3:20, concluding: "because the mother is a believing Christian it is to be hoped that her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer."<sup>68</sup>

### ***Why Would God Allow This to Happen?***

Even with this biblical comfort that the pastor can bring to mourning parents, their grief will not instantly vanish. One of the most common questions asked in this situation is "Why? Why would God allow this to happen to my child, to me?" Luther puts well what pastors will first want to bring such grieving parents to understand:

First, inasmuch as one cannot and ought not know the hidden judgment of God in such a case – why, after every possible care had been taken, God did not allow the child to be born alive and be baptized – these mothers should calm themselves and have faith that God's will is always better than ours, though it may seem otherwise to us from our human point of view. They should be confident that God is not angry with them or with others who are involved.<sup>69</sup>

God in his love and wisdom has determined not to reveal to us all of the reasons why he allows our loved ones to be taken from us before we are ready. This can be especially difficult to grasp with the death of a child who lived only a few weeks or months, and never outside the womb. The pastor can guide grieving parents to let God be God and direct them continually to the promises of God that they *can* be certain of. He will point them to the cross for infinite comfort regarding their child and for the assurance that in Christ God will enable them to bear this cross, even as it weighs heavily upon them.

Further biblical comfort and guidance can be found in the account of David and his infant son in 2 Samuel 12. One could question whether this account would apply specifically to the

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<sup>67</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Locorum Theologicorum Tomus Nonus*, ed. Johann F. Cotta (Tübingen: Johann Georg Cotta, 1769), 285.

<sup>68</sup> Luther, "Comfort for Women Who have Had a Miscarriage," 247-248.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

case of unbaptized infants,<sup>70</sup> and yet the pastor will greatly benefit from studying these verses for his ministry to bereaved parents. As punishment for his adultery with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan informed David that the son born to them would die. While his child was ill, David fasted, wept, and refused food or comfort (vv16-17) as he pleaded to God to have mercy on his son (vv16, 23). Yet once his child did die (v18), David did not linger in his grief, but instead he cleaned himself up, worshiped the Lord, and started eating again (v20). David found peace in his son's rest and the hope of reunion with him (vv22-23). This enabled him to return to the vocations God had called him to as Bathsheba's husband, Solomon's father, and ruler of God's people (vv24-31).

In a similar way believing parents can imitate David's example of godly grieving. The pastor can gently remind them over time that excessive grieving and mourning is not only unhealthy, but can lead to sin against God<sup>71</sup> as an indication that their love for their lost child may be overshadowing their love for and trust in God. From this story we do not need to assume that David simply "got over" his grief and moved on, even though he did drastically reverse his behavior once his son was gone.<sup>72</sup> In the same way, bereaved parents should not be made to feel that they just have to put this trauma behind them, almost as if it had never happened. As with David there is a need for mourners to maintain balance between healthy grief and staying faithful to the vocations to which God has called them. Pastors can stand by their side as they struggle to maintain this balance. Finally, just like David, believers can lean on the future hope of resurrection and their blessed reunion with their lost child before the throne of God. This is the hope and comfort pastors will gladly share with hurting hearts that they might begin to heal.

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<sup>70</sup> The debate surrounds the sentence, "On the seventh day the child died" (v18) and whether this is counting from the day of his birth or from the days since Nathan had pronounced the Lord's judgment to David. Robert Bergen is one who takes "the seventh day" in 12:15 as referring to the seventh day from birth, and he sees great significance in this fact for David's response, *The New American Commentary: 1,2 Samuel*, (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996). A.A. Anderson reckons this from the day of Nathan's announcement, not the day of his birth, and concludes: "Therefore the actual age of the child at the time of its death is unknown," A. A. Anderson, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 11: 2 Samuel* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 163-164.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Mt 10:37-39.

<sup>72</sup> John R. Mittelstaedt, *The People's Bible Commentary: Samuel* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 237.



### ***The Need for Balance***

As the pastor applies all of this biblical guidance and comfort, he will also want to make sure he is balanced in what he says, taking care not to give any false impressions about other important biblical truths. Like all people, unborn children were conceived in sin (Ps 51:5) and by nature are objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:1-3). Scripture does not teach that the children of believers have a right to salvation by nature simply because their parents are believers. Rather, the children of believers have God's word and promise made to them that overrides their inherent sin (Ge 17:7; Mt 19:14), a promise from God to which we hold him.

Care must also be taken to ensure that parents do not get the impression that it is permissible to delay or neglect baptism. Baptism is both a command from our almighty God and a promise to deliver our children from sin, death, and the devil through the means he has provided. Baptism is something believers will eagerly bring their children to receive. Here applies the axiom quoted throughout the church's history: "Not deprivation, but contempt of the sacrament condemns."<sup>73</sup>

In connection with the promises regarding prayer, the pastor will also want to be careful that he does not make prayer equal to the means of grace God has given, the gospel in word and sacrament.<sup>74</sup> Nor should the impression be given that we are trying to teach that someone can truly believe for someone else. Scripture clearly says that each person must be saved by his own faith (Ro 1:17, Hab 2:4). At the same time we do not discount the power of prayer when it is made in the name of Christ and in accordance with his will as he has revealed it regarding the little children of believers. We are simply trusting that God answers our prayers made in the name of Christ as he has promised to do.

### ***Treat as Any Other Believer Dying in the Lord***

In summary, then, how will a pastor want to approach this deeply important issue of ministering to believers who have lost a child in pregnancy? Do we state with absolute certainty that they are saved and before the very throne of God at this moment? No, just as we do not say

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume IV, St. Augustin: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J.R. King (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 462.

<sup>74</sup> Bugenhagen is in danger of this when he says, "For Christ is in his word and promise, in his Sacrament, and in our prayers, offered according to his commandment – indeed, in our own bodies – is present now – effectually and substantially. Oh, what an inexpressible grace of God!" Hess, "The Faith of Unbaptized Infants," 38.

that with any person, since God alone has the ability to look into a person's heart (1 Sa 16:7). We would not equate our certainty regarding an individual's salvation with our certainty regarding Christ's death and resurrection (1 Co 15:3-8).

But just as we deal with the death of any other confessor of Christ, it is not the biblical way to cast doubt when there is real comfort to be given, as if the possibility of unbelief or hypocrisy were the predominant concern which God wants us to consider. The apostolic principle of offering real comfort at the death of believers is one that is deeply woven into the message of God's word.<sup>75</sup> Since Scripture gives us good reason to believe in the salvation of children of believers who die in pregnancy, this is also how we should deal with believers mourning the loss of an unborn child.

If this approach is taken, then the applications are evident. This approach leads pastors to treat the departed children of believers just as other believers who have departed in faith. Pastors will confirm their members in the sure promises God has made regarding their children. The pastor can comfort the survivors with the hope which the rest of the world does not have (1 Th 4:13), the hope of the resurrection. He can give to parents the closure and to their children the dignity of a Christian burial. He can comfort them with the hope of a future reunion, as King David once consoled himself and his wife (2 Sa 12:23). He can comfort them with the hope of a time when they will no longer have to fear the pain of losing their young children, no matter how briefly they lived (Isa 65:20). He can comfort them with the joy of knowing that their Savior, who himself was once unborn, is now with their child forever (Mt 1:20-21; 1 Th 4:17). He can comfort them with the knowledge that just as their child's creation was precious in God's sight (Ps 139:13-17), so also was their child's death (Ps 116:15). Not only will these words of God sustain the faith of bereaved parents, but delivering this comfort to broken hearts is one of the pastor's greatest joys. It is the encouragement which all believers are called upon to share with their brothers and sisters in faith (1 Th 4:18).

#### **4. Practical Considerations for Pastors**

Just as pastors need to understand what Scripture has to say about the unborn and the comfort God's word offers to believers in cases of pregnancy loss, so they will also need to

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

understand the people they serve and the world in which they live. Even with a solid foundation in Scripture regarding unborn life and pregnancy loss, pastors may still struggle to serve Christians if they are not prepared for the challenges that confront them. Therefore, to help the pastor in his preparation, we will first examine these challenges involved with pregnancy loss and then proceed to offer some suggestions as to how pastors may overcome these problems.

#### **4.1 The Problematic State of Pregnancy Loss Ministry**

##### ***The Problem of Reality***

The objective reality of pregnancy loss is one that may not often hit home with us. For this reason pastors will want to be aware of the basic terminology used for pregnancy loss as well as the reality of this issue, even within the United States. There are a number of technical distinctions and terms one could learn about pregnancy loss, but the following are the two most common and important distinctions to know: 1) *Miscarriage* is defined as “a natural, unexpected termination of pregnancy when the baby is incapable of sustaining life outside the womb in the first twenty weeks of gestation.”<sup>76</sup> Tim Clinton and Diane Langberg note that “the process of miscarriage can drag out for several days and can be physically exhausting and painful. As the uterus expels the fetus, a woman may experience heavy bleeding accompanied by blood clots or tissue, severe cramping, and sometimes crippling back pain.”<sup>77</sup> 2) *Stillbirth*, according to the National Stillbirth Society, is the intrauterine death and subsequent delivery of a developing infant that occurs beyond 20 completed weeks of gestation.”<sup>78</sup>

Miscarriage is the most frequent type of pregnancy loss, accounting for about 95% of all pregnancy losses. Thomas Moe notes that miscarriage occurs in 15-25% of all pregnancies, and yet some consider this conservative.<sup>79</sup> The American Pregnancy Association (APA) lists the following statistics:

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<sup>76</sup> Tim Clinton and Diane Langberg, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 196.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>78</sup> American Pregnancy Association, <http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-loss/stillborn-trying-to-understand/> (accessed December 2, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 4.

- Women under thirty-five have a 15 percent chance of miscarriage.
- Women thirty-five to forty-five have a 20-35 percent chance of miscarriage.
- Women over forty-five can have up to a 50 percent chance of miscarriage.
- A woman who has had a previous miscarriage has a 25 percent chance of having another (only a slightly elevated risk compared to non-miscarrying women).<sup>80</sup>

As the trend grows for women to have children later in life, it is also possible that there will be a rise in the number of miscarriages in our country.<sup>81</sup> Often a miscarriage may go unnoticed and be regarded as a missed or unusually heavy period.

It is estimated that a little under 1% of pregnancies end in stillbirth, but this is still three times as many that die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).<sup>82</sup> The APA gives somewhat different numbers when it says “Stillbirth occurs in about 1 in 160 pregnancies. The majority of stillbirths happen before labor, whereas a small percentage occurs during labor and delivery.”<sup>83</sup>

In view of these statistics, then, it is understandable that the search for a cause of pregnancy loss and a way to prevent it has been ongoing for many years.<sup>84</sup> Yet each situation is unique and often the official cause can never be determined. Michael Berman lists the results of a pregnancy loss study which involved 9,023 subjects. In this study 257 different types of known causes of pregnancy loss were found among *less than half* of the participants (44%). For the remaining 5,049 participants (56%), the causes were never determined conclusively.<sup>85</sup> Some have pointed to corollary explanations like smoking or drug use during pregnancy, but nothing that definitively proves causation for pregnancy loss.<sup>86</sup> Some suggest that most of the miscarriages that occur within the first trimester “are the result of an incorrect chromosomal division,” which may be connected to genetics but is most often “a chance mutation.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> American Pregnancy Association, <http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-complications/miscarriage/> (accessed on December 2, 2014).

<sup>81</sup> Leah McLaren, “Miscarriage: polite society’s last taboo.” *The Globe and Mail*, November 17, 2013. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/miscarriage-polite-societys-last-taboo/article15446661/> (accessed September 30, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> American Pregnancy Association, <http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-loss/stillborn-trying-to-understand/>. Accessed on December 2, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Hunt, “Pastoral care and miscarriage,” 267.

<sup>85</sup> Michael R. Berman, ed., *Parenthood Lost: Healing the Pain after Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 197.

<sup>86</sup> Hunt, “Pastoral care and miscarriage,” 267.

In view of this Hunt concludes that “Whatever the cause, there is no way known to prevent a miscarriage.”<sup>88</sup> Pregnancy loss is a reality that no one can or should ignore. It happens to many people, perhaps more than we like to think about. The stark reality of pregnancy loss in our world urges newly pregnant parents not to just assume that every pregnancy will simply go on without complications, even if they have had “smooth pregnancies” before. Knowledge of the realities of pregnancy loss will also prepare pastors to minister to grieving parents. Finally, an awareness of these realities will also reveal just how much of a problem there is as we look at the truth of how the world in general reacts to the news of miscarriage.

### ***The Problem of Response***

In view of these sobering realities, one would think that the care and support for pregnancy loss would be easily accessible for anyone in need of it. Unfortunately, there is much evidence that says otherwise. Although pregnancy loss occurs frequently and everywhere, it is not until a person has a miscarriage that they learn how many others have also lost children during pregnancy. In some ways it resembles a secret club,<sup>89</sup> but one that no one wants to join.

How did it get like this? How did miscarriage and stillbirth receive the taboo and mistreatment they have today? Next we will consider several explanations for this problem in reaction.

### ***Ignorance of Reality***

Part of the problem is connected to what Moe calls the “American success myth.” By this he means that many Americans have bought into the assumption that the death of a baby is a rare occurrence, since America has some of the best health-care facilities and some very health-conscious people.<sup>90</sup> Yet Moe disproves this erroneous assumption by pointing out America’s low infant survival rate in comparison with other nations: “America has continually been a per capita

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>88</sup> Hunt, “Pastoral care and miscarriage,” 268.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Becky Thompson, “How Abortion Has Changed the Discussion of Miscarriage.” *Scissortail Silk*, May 13, 2014. <http://www.scissortailsilk.com/2014/05/13/how-abortion-has-changed-the-discussion-of-miscarriage/> (accessed December 2, 2014).

<sup>90</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 1.

leader in many different types of baby losses compared to other industrialized nations.”<sup>91</sup> He acknowledges that not only is it difficult to account for the disproportionate number of infant mortalities compared to America’s abundant resources, but it is even more difficult to explain our inability to solve this dilemma.

### ***The Unborn Not Treated like Real People***

The American success myth aside, however, perhaps the most obvious reason for the taboo surrounding pregnancy loss is that we live in a world which devalues the life of the unborn so much. In a country where abortion is so prevalent it is no surprise that the loss of a pregnancy is viewed by many as a minor event in one’s life.<sup>92</sup> Moe observes that people generally equate the expected amount of grieving and loss with the amount of contact one has had with the departed. Thus less contact supposedly equals less grief. Moe concludes that “Most of the general public thinks of pregnancy loss as a lesser loss than a loss of a ‘child that really lived.’”<sup>93</sup>

With early miscarriages in particular, people often try to console those who are suffering with the knowledge that it would have been much harder to lose the baby later on in the pregnancy. People usually mean well by this statement, but often the only thing mourners will hear is someone saying that their child was not a real life yet. Whether a child is lost early in pregnancy or later on, the pain is different, but not necessarily worse.<sup>94</sup> One study has even shown the fault in assuming that those who have an early miscarriage will therefore have less grief than those who lose a child later in pregnancy.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 5-6.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Thompson, “How Abortion Has Changed the Discussion of Miscarriage”: “After all, it is hard for a society to mourn the loss of WANTED unborn life when it is busy calling it ‘tissue’ and discrediting its personhood. It is hard for a society to embrace a mourning mother for her loss of tissue when it is busy defending another mother’s right to dispose of it. . . Society can never acknowledge that we lost a baby and with the same breath declare the rest to be tissue. That is how abortion has changed the discussion of miscarriage – it has silenced it.”

<sup>93</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Leis-Newman, “Miscarriage and loss.” *Monitor on Psychology* 43.6:56, June 2012. Available from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/miscarriage.aspx>; Internet; accessed November 1, 2014.

### *The Problem of Insensitivity*

To add insult to injury, some treat pregnancy loss with surprising insensitivity. We live in a society where people publicly say about Michelle Duggar of *19 Kids and Counting* when she had a miscarriage: “I think her uterus is saying, enough is enough...”; “I think they’re child hoarders”; or “One must understand the difference between being a parent and being a collector. The latter becomes compulsive.”<sup>96</sup>

Even when this insensitivity comes out unintentionally it is still painful for griever to hear. Marie Allen and Shelly Marks also provide examples of harmful things people say without realizing just how damaging they can be.<sup>97</sup> Some of the more extreme examples include: “After three miscarriages, you should be getting used to this;” “I have a friend who has four children. She said to me, ‘At least you don’t look at your husband and get pregnant;’ ” “My sister-in-law got pregnant. I was miserable. My mother-in-law told me this was her turn; mine was over. She said, ‘Don’t spoil her pregnancy with your grief;’ ” “Oh, honey, I’ve lost so many. It wasn’t a baby. It was just a blob.” It goes without saying how hurtful these statements can be as they aim at diminishing the loss which parents are enduring.

Society in general also seems to react differently when one observes the comparisons made between the loss of a pregnancy and the loss of a born child. One blog from babycenter.com sees a vast difference between miscarriage and stillbirth and claims “Miscarriages are NOT baby deaths.”<sup>98</sup> This may be because society looks at miscarriage more as the loss of a “hope” or an “idea” than that of a real person.<sup>99</sup>

Sometimes people who are fully aware of a miscarriage act as if nothing has happened. McLaren mentions a friend who lost a baby five months into pregnancy. Despite the entire office knowing she had been pregnant, the majority of the office ignored her, and her boss went on with business, acting as if nothing had happened.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Kennisha Hill, “Michelle Duggar, Miscarriages, and the Value of Life.” *Relevant*. April 16, 2012. <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/blog/28922-michelle-duggar-miscarriages-a-the-value-of-life> (accessed September 25, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 118-121.

<sup>98</sup> Hill, “Michelle Duggar.”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> McLaren, “Polite society’s last taboo.”

### ***Lack of Discussion about Pregnancy Loss***

The ignorance of others in large part has contributed to the relative silence surrounding pregnancy loss. Elise Barrett remarks that “because miscarriage isn’t talked about, many people have never experienced this kind of loss or known of it in another’s life, so they respond lightly out of true ignorance, having no idea of the real pain that accompanies a pregnancy loss.”<sup>101</sup> But as Clinton and Langberg point out, “Many women describe the emotional anguish of a miscarriage as *one of the most intense pains they ever experience in their lives*.”<sup>102</sup>

However, it is not just onlookers who often treat a miscarriage as if the child never existed. Surrounded by a society that so often reacts so negatively and insensitively to pregnancy loss, it is no surprise that grieving parents sometimes contribute to the taboo of miscarriage and stillbirth by their reluctance to talk about their loss. It is unfortunate that after a pregnancy loss those who mourn often will keep silent in an effort to accommodate the feelings of others. Barrett relates her uncomfortable experience of sharing the news of her miscarriage with fellow seminary students. She describes the awkward situation as “a rough slap to the face” and explains: “I would immediately feel guilty for violating some perceived academic social contract and for not being able to keep my grief to myself.”<sup>103</sup> The griever knows that this news will make others uncomfortable, and, in a tragic twist, the one who should be mourning and being comforted is instead thinking of others’ comfort, while very few, if any, stop to consider the pain of their loss.

Often this problem is compounded by the fact that many parents wait until the end of the first trimester, when pregnancy loss is statistically far less likely, before they feel “safe” enough to tell others.<sup>104</sup> Yet when they do lose their child, they often find it that much harder to let others know that the life was lost for someone they did not even know existed.

As Allen and Shelly discovered in interviewing 100 women who had gone through miscarriage, many women are eager to discuss their feelings and emotions, but they did not want

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<sup>101</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 101.

<sup>102</sup> Clinton and Langberg, *Counseling Women*, 198, emphasis original.

<sup>103</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. McLaren, “Polite society’s last taboo.” Vredevelt, *Empty Arms*, 56-57, describes how one mother had a friend tell her to wait before telling anyone else that she was pregnant, reasoning “You could miscarry, you know.” When this woman, who had already been eagerly telling her family and friends the news, did in fact miscarry several days later, her friend said, “I told you it would have been better to wait before announcing your pregnancy.”



to be viewed as “silly” or “dwelling on it.”<sup>105</sup> They appear to have given in to the pressure from the world as described above. Like Barrett above, many women consider their pregnancy loss a secret they must keep, as one woman put it: “I would smile for the outside world to see. But inside, I was dying.”<sup>106</sup> This pressure to hide the pain of loss at the death of a child is a serious problem for any Christian to have, and it calls out for help. This silence also poses a serious challenge to pastors as they wrestle with how they can minister to those who may be afraid to reveal their grief to anyone in the first place.

### ***The Problem in the Medical World***

It is a logical byproduct of a world where the theory of evolution is engrained in the minds of so many that the death of unborn children would be described with such cold terminology. Some terms that one will typically encounter among medical workers or official documents are: “spontaneous abortion, unintended fetal death, termination of a wanted pregnancy, fetal wastage, miscarriage.”<sup>107</sup> Even with the very common term “miscarriage” some may feel that it fails to meet the sensitivity which the death of a real child calls for.<sup>108</sup>

Terminology is not the only problem, however. Far more indicative of the real problem is the attitude of many health care workers who treat parents going through pregnancy loss. Elizabeth Leis-Newman points to the origin of the mistreatment of miscarriage in the medical world when she quotes Janet Jaffe, “Because it is medically common, the impact of miscarriage is often underestimated.”<sup>109</sup> Kathleen Seaton states that with her miscarriage the doctor simply told them that miscarriage was “nature’s way of insuring healthy babies.”<sup>110</sup> Pam Vredevelt also recounts some of the “blunders made by medical personnel.” One mother experiencing miscarriage in a hospital had five of her repeated calls for assistance ignored by the staff. When a nurse finally did come, things only got worse: “I lay there with tears streaming down my face.

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<sup>105</sup> Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 8.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Hunt, “Pastoral care and miscarriage,” 265.

<sup>108</sup> The title of the following article alone shows just how this can be an issue with some mothers: R. Wayne Willis, “Please, don’t call it a miscarriage : my baby is dead.” *American Protestant Hospital Association Bulletin* 46, no. 3 (January 1, 1982): 39-40. Marks and Allen quote one mother as saying “I hate that term ‘miscarriage.’ It’s like a football that’s being tossed to you and you don’t quite catch it,” *Miscarriage*, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Leis-Newman, “Miscarriage and loss.”

<sup>110</sup> Seaton, “A Grief Unobserved,” 38.

Then in a cold, know-it-all voice the nurse said, ‘Honey...I’ve had three of these. You’ll get through it. In fact, I was glad about my last miscarriage because we didn’t want more children anyway.’”<sup>111</sup> Another mother reports: “When my doctor told me I had lost the baby he didn’t even look me in the eye – he looked at the wall instead.”<sup>112</sup> One more woman had a similar story: “Once my doctor detected there wasn’t a heartbeat from the baby, he left the room and never returned. I think he found some excuse to flee so he wouldn’t have to face me. I felt like I had committed a crime.”<sup>113</sup>

### ***The Problem in the Religious World***

Sadly, even Christians and members of our congregations may not treat miscarriage or stillbirth much differently than the unbelieving world around them. Moe says that “As much as we religious leaders would like to deny it, religious organizations can also be more of the problem than the solution...we may view members of our faith community as essential for our support rather than people to whom the organization is designed to support.”<sup>114</sup> Vredevelt describes the experience of one woman who was devastated after her second stillbirth: “After the baby’s death a lady came up to me in church and said, ‘Before you get pregnant again it would be a good idea to search your heart and make sure you’ve gotten rid of all the sin in your life.’” Another woman received the following letter marked by misapplied biblical principles after her pregnancy loss:

The Bible teaches us that what a person sows he will also reap. I remember you telling me that you had had an abortion several years back. Maybe with this miscarriage you have reaped the disservice you sowed years back. No doubt your payment has been paid. The Bible says, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ Most likely your next pregnancy will go just fine as you continue to serve the Lord with all your heart.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Pam W. Vredevelt, *Empty Arms: Emotional Support for Those Who Have Suffered Miscarriage or Stillbirth* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), 54.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 55; cf. Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 123-125, for other examples of health professionals mistreating pregnancy loss. Yet it should also be noted that some women report that the medical professionals treating them acted with dignity and respect toward their children, something which mothers appreciated. Cf. Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 122.

<sup>114</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 97.

<sup>115</sup> Vredevelt, *Empty Arms*, 59-60.

WELS pastors should not think this is something that happens only among other Christian congregations and could never happen among their own people. One pastor who has had much experience in counseling for pregnancy loss says “Yes, this does impact believers and the world and even WELS believers often (unintentionally) seem to minimize the loss.” Another pastor relates how members “were ridiculed for naming their stillborn child or wanting a service or even a burial plot.”

A related issue is what Moe identifies as the “ministry problem.”<sup>116</sup> With this he means the various ways in which the clergy are often unprepared to meet the challenge of pregnancy loss. One impediment to ministers is the lack of awareness or experience of the physical and emotional issues connected with pregnancy, along with how these factor into the loss of a child. Ministers simply do not experience the attachment to a child that mothers feel, and as a result many clergy will be physically present during a pregnancy loss but will not enter emotionally, effectively leaving the family alone in their grief.<sup>117</sup> This is bad enough coming from strangers or other outsiders, but it hits home even more when it comes from the clergy. As Elizabeth Kirkley-Best notes, “the one member of the community most likely to detect problems [among grieving parents] is the clergy person,” due to the “continuous contact” they have with their members.<sup>118</sup>

Besides unpreparedness, clergy insensitivity is another key issue. Unfortunately, many clergy can be blind to this as well. Moe conducted a study of 284 clergy from different denominations at Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse, WI. His research revealed a tendency among ministers to distinguish between the loss of a pregnancy or young baby and the loss of an older child. While only 14 respondents (4.9%) considered the loss of a 12-year old child unworthy of ministry, 29 (10.2%) considered the loss of a baby, and 70 (24.6%) considered a miscarriage unworthy of ministry.<sup>119</sup> Some clergy maintained that in pregnancy loss “any such parental grief had little place in the Christian life.”<sup>120</sup> One might contend that at least 75% of clergy actually did consider miscarriage worthy of response. Yet this ignores the real pastoral issue here, that not

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<sup>116</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 7-13.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>118</sup> Kirkley-Best, “On Stillbirth,” 19.

<sup>119</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 10.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

just 70 different families on one occasion, but *all of the Christians* being served by those 70 ministers at this one hospital would not receive the proper pastoral ministry their grief calls for.

### ***Inconsistency in View of the Biblical Teaching on Unborn Life***

One further issue needs to be discussed in connection with the general problem of how pregnancy loss is handled in our world, particularly among Christians. At the start it should be emphasized that this is not an accusation against all Christians everywhere. There are certainly times when Christians and clergy deal with pregnancy loss in the manner it deserves.<sup>121</sup> But speaking in general terms of the Christian church as a whole, there are two inconsistencies that come to light here.

The first is a need for consistency in view of the biblical principles regarding the sanctity of life, especially the life of the unborn, which were demonstrated in the first part of this paper. If we maintain that an unborn child is a real life and a real person, it stands to reason that Christians would treat this child just like any other human being when he or she dies. Furthermore, if this child is what we call him or her, and not just a fetus or embryo, but our “child,” will we not react at his or her passing not only as if another human has died, but as is in fact the case, as the death of one of our own, dearly loved children? Even if this child is unborn, he or she is one of our own children, one of God’s precious creations, a child whom he loves and whose God he promised to be (Ge 17:7). If there is any implicit shame in their death, then there must also be implicit shame in their life, the life that God has given.

### ***Inconsistency in View of the Pro-Life Movement***

The other inconsistency is brought to light by the abortion crisis in our country. The high rates of abortion support the notion that a large percentage of our country does not value the life of the unborn. But perhaps just as telling is the relative silence on miscarriage and stillbirth. There is certainly nothing wrong or un-Christian with the pro-life fight against abortion, and it is intertwined with the broader issue of pregnancy loss. But here also lies the problem. There is a “tragic irony” that the concern over abortion has not created more compassion for those who

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 125; Vredevelt, *Empty Arms*, 58-59.

experience unintended pregnancy loss.<sup>122</sup> Rachel Lewis makes the following insight about this pro-life inconsistency and the importance of how pro-lifers treat miscarriage: “Both babies may have died at the same gestation – one by choice, the other by chance. But the value attached to each child completely depended on how that child died.”<sup>123</sup> She then points out some of the specific ways this discrepancy among pro-life advocates plays out in real life:

An aborted baby deserves to be grieved. *A miscarried one deserves to be gotten over. And quickly.*

An aborted baby could have been the next Einstein or Bach or Mother Theresa. *A miscarried baby was probably damaged goods...*

An aborted baby was a real person, and should have the rights as such. *A miscarried baby was not a **real** child – naming them really is kinda weird. Speaking of weird...counting them in the line-up of your children? THAT’S weird.*<sup>124</sup>

Lewis concludes, “A person is a person...no matter how small, *And I would add...no matter when or how they died.*”<sup>125</sup>

Especially in the minds of Christians, it should be the case that certain types of death are not discarded simply because of how they happened. Though this analogy certainly limps, to focus on abortion at the expense of natural pregnancy loss would be somewhat like focusing on the fight against assisted suicide at the expense of fighting cancer and all other kinds of natural death. Whether a death is human-caused (abortion or assisted suicide) or natural (miscarriage/stillbirth or cancer), it is the death of a real person. It does not matter whether the person is elderly, young, or even just several weeks old – the death of real human life deserves real attention.

Pastors need to be aware of the danger which the taboo of miscarriage presents to them and their flock. This taboo can leave both unprepared to face the reality and grief of pregnancy loss. Both pastors and the grieving Christians they serve may have regret heaped upon their

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<sup>122</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 3. Cf also p 67, “It is also unfortunate that the focus of this issue is currently placed wholly on the issue of induced abortion with little emphasis left for support toward those who grieve their lost infants.”

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, “Why miscarriage matters when you’re pro-life.”

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

misery, all because they did not know what to say, think, or do at the unexpected loss of a child. As one WELS pastor commented, pregnancy loss is something every pastor will have to deal with at some point in his ministry. For this reason pastors will want to be sure they know just how real this problem is, for their sakes and for that of their people.

#### **4.2 Addressing the Problems in Pregnancy Loss Ministry**

The fact is that the objective reality of pregnancy loss is unlikely to change. Some percentage of pregnancies will continue to be lost as they have throughout history. Even though we can do nothing to prevent pregnancy loss, we can do something about how we handle it. As pastors prepare to minister in times of pregnancy loss, they will also want to prepare themselves for how they will respond in a loving and compassionate way. This kind of preparation calls for an uncommon awareness and sensitivity compared to the rest of the world. It requires the pastor to step outside his comfort zone. But the call to serve God's suffering, grieving people, to relieve their anxious consciences and to bring the love of God to them will keep him focused in his efforts.

One of the more practical ways a pastor can prepare himself is to become more conscious of the actions or statements that may only aggravate an already difficult situation. He will want to avoid the pious platitudes and clichés that many others tend to offer in what they think will be comfort.<sup>126</sup> Even the common complaints about raising children that people so often make can come across as flippant remarks to parents who have lost a child. One father reflects on this issue: "For weeks I had convinced myself I was going to be a father. As every parent knows, this changes how you think. Those flippant statements you may have made about raising a child all of a sudden carry some weight. Even the little things you say to people make you think twice. *Would I say that if my kid could hear me?*"<sup>127</sup>

Regarding the inconsistencies mentioned above, Lewis describes some helpful ways that pro-life Christians can be consistent in their approach to the loss of all unborn life:

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Appendix D for a comprehensive list.

<sup>127</sup> Patrick Stafford, "Men and Miscarriage." *Christianity Today*. February 11, 2014. Web only. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/february-web-only/men-and-miscarriage.html> (accessed on November 7, 2014).

Perhaps instead of just standing outside of Planned Parenthood... What if you took it one step further? What if you held the hand of a grieving mom who miscarried at 4 weeks, 6 weeks, 18 weeks or more? What if you never compared the loss of a 4-weeker to a 20-weeker?... What if you held back any trite, easy answers that promised God's will and promised easy comfort? What if you just wrapped your arms around her the way Christ would?... What if you didn't just affirm to the world that all babies are valuable—but you also affirmed to a bereaved mom that HER baby was irreplaceable, and would forever be missed?<sup>128</sup>

### *Understanding the Grief*

At the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus includes the following among his Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Mt 5:4). Here Jesus binds the ability to grieve to the ability to be comforted. When a person is not allowed to grieve, the door for comforting them will be that much harder to open. Therefore, the first step in understanding the grief of those who have lost a child through pregnancy loss is recognizing *the fact that they actually are grieving*.

Yet, for a number of reasons far too many just do not comprehend what can be most detrimental to survivors of pregnancy loss: that their grief is real. This grief is so real that, as one study found, miscarriage can affect a woman and her family for years to come.<sup>129</sup> Bruce Pierce comments on this truth, “One of the common misunderstandings of grief is that it is an illness, rather than a natural process following bereavement, especially in the case of miscarriage or stillbirth... Grief, however, should not be seen as something to be overcome, with the associated and implicit notion of cure.”<sup>130</sup> Just like with many other forms of grief, the grief following pregnancy loss is deeply felt by those affected, both by parents as well as other family and friends. Studies indicate that the loss of a child is at or near the top of grief stress levels – most find it at the level of unspeakable horror.<sup>131</sup>

If the pastor is to properly minister to grieving parents, he needs to at least attempt to comprehend with a grieving mother “the disparity between the depth of what she feels, and

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<sup>128</sup> Lewis, “Why miscarriage matters when you're pro-life.”

<sup>129</sup> Leis-Newman, “Miscarriage and loss”; Allen and Marks comment that “Grief, unless expressed and validated, will persist.” *Miscarriage*, xi.

<sup>130</sup> Pierce, *Miscarriage and Stillbirth*, 32.

<sup>131</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 63; Cf. Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 27: “Studies have shown that the grief experience after losing a wanted pregnancy, no matter how advanced it is, is very similar to the grief experience after losing a closest family member or friend.”

others' indications to her that she has experienced a little disappointment.”<sup>132</sup> He will want to realize that a mother may feel “an abyss between herself and those she felt supported by and close to just yesterday.”<sup>133</sup> The pastor will not want to be among those who share joy in her pregnancy but are silent and absent when her child is lost, leaving her to feel abandoned in addition to the grief of her loss.

Part of understanding the reality of grief following pregnancy loss is viewing it just like the loss of any other person. However, as much as this grief is like other forms of grief, it is also very unique. One of the key issues for a pastor is trying to wrap his head around the problem parents have in grieving for a child whom they, in a sense, never even had or knew. This creates further complications for them when outsiders look at them strangely for regarding the child they lost just like any one child.

In comparing the losses of different kinds of people Moe has a memorable way of putting the uniqueness of pregnancy loss: “The equation is very simple: to lose a parent is to lose your past; to lose a spouse is to lose your present; to lose a child is to lose your future.”<sup>134</sup> According to Moe, with the loss of parents or spouses we understand the potential for losing them – our past is irretrievable and the present is constantly leaving us. We are therefore more likely to expect losing our past or present (parents or spouses) than a child. With the loss of a child we lose our future, and there is no direction, as Moe says, “Without a future, everything has lost all meaning.”<sup>135</sup>

Moe also highlights the various aspects of grief associated with the loss of a child. Parents may view their loss in terms of the child as an extension of oneself, as an image of hope, as an image of success, and as an image of identity, among other possibilities.<sup>136</sup> In all of these potential losses, however, “it is crucial that the griever neither be assigned grief impact nor denied grief impact. The griever should be free to indicate their areas of difficulty and their approaches toward healing.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Marks and Allen, *Miscarriage*, 17.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 76.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-74.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



### *Understanding the Differences*

Acknowledging that the grief of pregnancy loss is real is not the end of the matter, however. This real grief may also express itself in a variety of ways. As Moe says, “No two grieverers will experience their loss in the same manner.”<sup>138</sup> In every situation the pastor encounters, there will be different situations, different people, and different expressions of grief to take into account.

### *Different Situations*

Since there are a variety of situations the pastor may encounter, it would be good for pastors to acquaint themselves with at least some of possible scenarios. One of the main questions pastors will want to ask themselves is, “How many pregnancy losses has this couple been through?” If this pregnancy loss would have been their firstborn child, it will be important to understand the impact of this fact. Our society portrays the idea of having children in movies and television as something that is easy, and often accidental, and this picture may have an influence on couples. A 2014 Dutch study reveals that women considered their first pregnancy to be like “living on a cloud” as they “fantasized about life with their little one, mulled over names, and obsessively searched every aspect of pregnancy on the Internet.”<sup>139</sup> Being somewhat oblivious to the possibility of pregnancy loss, they may be shocked if they lose their first pregnancy. Often the thought of losing this child never occurs to first-time parents. In the aftermath of losing their first child they may wrestle with the reality that they never really had time to bond with their child while he or she was still alive.

If it is the case that the couple has already had other children, the pastor will want to avoid the common assumption that their living children somehow compensate for the loss of this pregnancy. Just as the prospect of future children does not take away the pain of losing *this* child, so the reality of already having other children does not remove the grief of losing *this* child. Even

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Laura Tedesco, “How My Miscarriage Changed My Next Pregnancy.” *Yahoo Health*. November 11, 2014. <https://www.yahoo.com/health/how-my-miscarriage-changed-my-next-pregnancy-102363155437.html> (accessed on November 12, 2014).

a mother who already has numerous children is not necessarily any less impacted by this loss than a woman who has lost her first and only child.<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, the time at which the pregnancy is lost will make a difference. This does not mean, however, that a child at six weeks is less of a child than one at six months or at birth. As mentioned before, the pastor will want to avoid giving any indications that this might be the case. At the same time pastors should realize that parents who have a mid-term or late-term miscarriage also have had more time to bond with their child. They have spent much time waiting for this child to come, only to have their anticipation crushed by the unexpected news of death. Often parents and other family members have invested themselves emotionally, physically, and financially in this child.

The seriousness of early pregnancy loss should not be overlooked either. The length of pregnancy at the time of loss is not always proportionate to the amount of grief parents may feel. Leis-Newman cites the research of Martha Diamond as she writes about how there is a common misunderstanding that the earlier the loss, the less grief a mother endures: “But most researchers have not been able to find an association between the length of gestation and intensity of grief, anxiety or depression (*Research in Nursing & Health*). A woman who has lost her child at 11 weeks may be as distraught as a woman who has lost her child at 20 weeks.”<sup>141</sup>

A stillbirth presents its own unique considerations, and not every stillbirth is the same. Some mothers they have known for weeks that their child was already gone and are confronted with the troubling prospect of having to deliver a baby they know is already dead. Pastors will not want to dismiss the physical pain women feel in these situations. Having to carry a dead baby within oneself is an emotional and psychological trauma that needs treatment.

These are just some of the various situations a pastor may face in his ministry.<sup>142</sup> With a proper grounding in the basics of Scripture and an understanding of the principles at work in these situations, a pastor will find himself better able to adapt to most situations, largely because he has thought through these issues in advance.

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. Hill, “Michelle Duggar,” as she relates the situation of Michelle Duggar, who had 19 children but still grieved the loss of her child in miscarriage.

<sup>141</sup> Leis-Newman, “Miscarriage and loss.”

<sup>142</sup> Other possible scenarios would include cases of multiple miscarriages or the loss of twins, triplets, and so on.

### ***Different People – Different Emotions***

As the pastor counsels believers who are enduring pregnancy loss, he will realize how these differences extend not just from one situation to another, but from couple to couple. One couple may not be nearly as distraught over their pregnancy loss as another couple who finds it to be one of the most distressing tests of their faith.

Moreover, this becomes even more complex when we consider how there can be stark contrasts between the individuals in each couple. This can often cause problems in how one or both partners cope and manage their grief.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, the pastor may also come to see that it is not only the parents affected by this loss, but their loved ones as well. For that reason also it will be beneficial to consider some person-specific aspects of dealing with pregnancy loss.

### ***The Mother's Perspective***

There are a number of emotions that a mother may feel after losing her child: anger, guilt, depression, loneliness, jealousy, failure, anxiety for future pregnancies, and so on.<sup>144</sup> It should be kept in mind that many of these emotional reactions may be shared by her spouse, others in the family, or even close friends, though usually in different degrees and ways.

First, there is a unique physical connection that mothers feel during pregnancy and pregnancy loss. Even when pastors have themselves experienced pregnancy loss before, telling grieving mothers, “I know how you feel” or something similar will often not be helpful, and may even be insulting. He may know what it is like to lose a child – but not to carry a child, to feel the emotional connection of a child moving and kicking within oneself.<sup>145</sup> For the pastor what is most important is not to tell her that he knows exactly how she feels, but to provide comfort and guidance from Scripture.

One of the most common avenues of coping with grief for losing a pregnancy is to blame oneself.<sup>146</sup> Mothers will often feel guilty and hold themselves responsible for the pregnancy loss.

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 29ff.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 148-158, for further discussion on these.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 7.

<sup>146</sup> Allen and Marks notes that about 75% of the women they interviewed “worried they had somehow inadvertently caused the demise of their babies.” Some of the more extreme ideas women come up with were expressed as follows: “Did jogging affect my hormones?”; “I had an argument with my husband. We shouldn’t have fought”; “I put a flea collar on my dog. There were toxins.”; “I danced too much. I jumped in a Hannukah game.” *Miscarriage*, 59-61.

They may search vigorously for a reason God would take their baby, often looking at sins of the past and concluding God is punishing them. Pastors can remind them that God is not punishing them for any sins. In this regard one WELS pastor wrote: “I want to make it clear to grieving parents and help them understand that a miscarriage/stillbirth is not punishment from God for sins committed by the parents.” One helpful approach would be to point them to the objective reality of miscarriage as a way of dispelling their self-inflicted guilt. There are literally hundreds of different reasons for miscarriage, most of which are biological or genetic and are not something they could prevent.<sup>147</sup>

Envy is also a common reaction to pregnancy loss. Mothers look with longing at the healthy, happy children of others. Louis Gamino and Ann Cooney refer to this feeling of wanting to hold and love a child who is not there as “empty arms.”<sup>148</sup> It is furthermore understandable that this emotion may be heightened in mothers who have lost their first pregnancy and have no living children of their own. Unfortunately, this pain can easily be aggravated after a loss if recovering, grieving mothers are indiscriminately placed in the same hospital rooms as mothers with their newborns.<sup>149</sup> What may be most effective in such situations is giving mothers an opportunity to express their feelings and unload their burden.<sup>150</sup>

Mothers may also ask the question: “Am I still a mother, even though my baby died?”<sup>151</sup> Pastors can remind grieving mothers that the death of their child does not discount his or her life. As Gamino and Cooney say, “Even if you had a miscarriage a short time into your pregnancy, you are still a mother. You conceived this child and carried her inside your body for her entire natural life... Yes, you are still a mother – forever.”<sup>152</sup>

### ***The Father’s Perspective***

In our American culture, it is often considered an essential part of manhood to hide one’s emotions.<sup>153</sup> In addition, modern advertising seems to imply that all men are disinterested in the

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<sup>147</sup> Berman, *Parenthood Lost*, 197.

<sup>148</sup> Gamino and Cooney, *When Your Baby Dies*, 38.

<sup>149</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, p 15.

<sup>150</sup> Gamino and Cooney, *When Your Baby Dies*, 38-39.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Allen and Marks, 96.

raising of their children.<sup>154</sup> This stereotype certainly has an impact on how fathers deal with the loss of their child. At such traumatic times, husbands often feel the need to be the strong one in the family, but this strength may be incorrectly equated with showing no emotion for the mother's sake.<sup>155</sup> Moe notes that often a father's concern for the mother's safety overshadows his own feelings of loss.<sup>156</sup>

Especially with early miscarriage, fathers tend to show little emotion. He has not had time to bond with the child and therefore feels little separation.<sup>157</sup> Moe calls the distinction between husband and wife "incongruent grieving."<sup>158</sup> Moe notes that this "incongruent grieving" can often move past the stage of initial differences to "a level of deeper hurt." When the wife does not understand why her spouse does not care enough, and the husband does not understand why his wife cannot get over it, the field is ripe for problems.<sup>159</sup> When the reaction among spouses differs widely, it can create severe relationship issues for years to come. On the other hand, one of the greatest mistakes a pastor could make would be to assume that every father will have less grief than the mother, and therefore concentrate all his efforts on the mother alone. Fathers may not always understand why they do not feel the same emotions as the mother, but they do still feel an emotional connection to their child.<sup>160</sup>

Unfortunately, fathers are often neglected in pregnancy loss ministry and may only be asked, "How is your wife doing?" rather than receiving the spiritual and emotional care they need and deserve. Allen and Marks comment that "men, too, need to talk about their losses and their feelings, and need someone to care and to listen."<sup>161</sup> Barrett refers to a 1998 study which said that "men are at risk of developing a chronic grief response [after a miscarriage] because

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<sup>154</sup> As one father observed: "Anything to do with commitment and pregnancy is left to women, and we're affected by this even if we don't think we are. (Ever seen a man in a diaper commercial?)," Stafford, "Men and Miscarriage."

<sup>155</sup> Allen and Marks, 95.

<sup>156</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 87.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>159</sup> Allen and Marks cite instances of husbands who simply went back to bed after their wife told them what happened or ran half-marathons with friends while their wife lay in a hospital bed as she recovered from her miscarriage. *Miscarriage*, 88-91.

<sup>160</sup> Stafford, "Men and Miscarriage." Allen and Marks, *Miscarriage*, 95.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

they are less likely to receive support and understanding.”<sup>162</sup> The simple remedy to this situation is not to assume, but to genuinely show concern for both mother and father, and to make a point of treating the father as an equal to his spouse as it regards being this child’s parent and in suffering a loss just as much as her.

### ***The Rest of the Family***

In his ministry during pregnancy loss the pastor will also be concerned about the rest of the family who is also grieving. While parents may often feel the most pain and loss, this in no way means that the rest of the family is immune to their own grief. Though they are not the parents and they did not lose a child, they did lose a brother or sister and are still blood-relatives of that child. Parents will want to consider what impact the loss of a brother or sister may have on their surviving children.

While some have opted to keep the news or details of pregnancy loss from their children, Moe says that “Sparing immediate hurt for these children only creates greater hurt at a later time.”<sup>163</sup> At the same time he does not advocate necessarily revealing all the information to them, but compares this situation to walking significant “tightropes.” He elaborates that too much information can confuse the child, while too little information can frustrate them: “Children’s questions should be answered wherever possible in as simple a manner as possible.”<sup>164</sup> It may also happen that some children will initially resent the news that they are going to have a sibling and then feel great remorse when that child dies. Special care will need to be taken to explain the situation, however, and to ensure the children do not irrationally blame themselves for this tragedy.<sup>165</sup>

Grandparents are usually another group that can be overlooked in a pregnancy loss,<sup>166</sup> but it is just as true that they too have lost a real life in their grandchild.<sup>167</sup> Although grandparents did not lose a child directly, they often suffer a “double hurt,” as Moe puts it: “They hurt from

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<sup>162</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 90.

<sup>163</sup> *Pastoral Care*, 137.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Gamino and Cooney, *When Your Baby Dies*, 54-56.

<sup>166</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 135.

<sup>167</sup> Gamino and Cooney, *When Your Baby Dies*, 49-50.

both their grief and their children's grief. They may add additional hurt if the loss leads them to relive their own pregnancy loss experience from earlier years."<sup>168</sup> Since grandparents are typically not members at the same church or do not live near their children, ministering to them may be out of the pastor's hands. Yet in time it may be helpful to remind grieving parents that their own parents are also suffering the loss of a grandchild. If possible, communication with grandparents may also be instrumental in helping to assure that the parents are able to recover from their loss in the long run.

### ***Raising Awareness of Pregnancy Loss***

Even as the pastor ministers to the individuals who are most affected by a particular pregnancy loss, it would still be beneficial to raise the overall awareness among his congregation of the issues surrounding pregnancy loss. As a preliminary step the most important thing a pastor can do is to remain faithful in his study of God's word. In particular it will be important to search for himself what Scripture teaches about unborn life and the blessings God gives to us in the gift of children. This will help him understand how much the way we talk can affect those who have lost a child. If the pastor presents himself as someone who values all life and cares for those who lost a baby, no matter how small it was, this will resonate with others.

In his preaching and teaching the pastor can also point out the grace of God in every child born healthy. Considering the fact that in pregnancy loss far more children may be lost than we even realize, it is even more understandable to regard the successful birth of a child as a miracle of God. By emphasizing the positive blessings of children whom God has given us, people will be more prepared to react in a God-pleasing way if they should go through the negative experience of pregnancy loss.

The pastor in his teaching and preaching can also avoid giving the impression that baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation. One WELS pastor expressed his concern in this regard. He is wary of any statements that would "seem to imply that baptism is the only way God can work on an infant." Hess also makes the point that a false impression in this matter would lead pregnant parents to doubt their child's salvation throughout the pregnancy.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> *Pastoral Care*, 135.

<sup>169</sup> Hess, "The Faith of Unbaptized Infants," 37.

If a pastor should happen to have this cross of losing a child come upon his own family, it is of course true that he can apply all that we have been discussing to himself and his family. First of all, for his sake and that of his family it may be beneficial to share the news of their loss with the rest of the congregation.<sup>170</sup> As the body of Christ believers can comfort and encourage one another, sharing in their grief and helping them heal.

Moreover, a pastor publicly sharing his family's pregnancy loss can also make his congregation more aware that losing a child does not have to be treated as a secret. This can be seen in the case of one WELS pastor who publicly informed the congregation of their miscarriage early in his ministry. This pastor says that over the course of two decades of ministry he has "had the opportunity to counsel many couples (I estimate 125-175 couples – maybe more) regarding the loss of children." It is probably no coincidence that a pastor who was willing to talk about his own story has had the chance to minister to hundreds of people because of it. When people sense a pastor is open to sensitive, personal issues, they are that much more willing to bring their pregnancy loss concerns to them rather than hide them. Sharing the news of pregnancy loss can have a larger impact than one might imagine.

One other way the pastor can raise this awareness is simply by letting parents know he is there for them. Seaton suggests the following approach: "Whenever the news of an expected child is shared, pastors may find it helpful to let women know that they are interested and available should special problems arise. Such gentle reminders may make it easier for parents to request support should difficulties with the pregnancy occur."<sup>171</sup> In making this suggestion pastors will want to consider how they can express that they are available in case of a problem while also not leading parents to worry that now something will go wrong with their pregnancy. This is the difficulty in raising awareness about something others would prefer not to think about – it is bad to obsess in worry, but it can be just as harmful to be caught completely off guard if pregnancy loss does occur.

There are even more ways to raise public awareness about pregnancy loss. Moe states that "Babies should be remembered at Memorial Day or other times as any other person who has

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<sup>170</sup> Vredevelt, describes the benefits of having her pastor address the congregation publicly regarding her own pregnancy loss, *Empty Arms*, 58-59.

<sup>171</sup> Seaton, "A Grief Unobserved," 42.



died.”<sup>172</sup> Many churches remember those believers who have died among them in the past year on Saints Triumphant Sunday.<sup>173</sup> In whatever way his church does this, and certainly with the parents’ knowledge and permission, a pastor may include the children lost in pregnancy among those who have fallen asleep that year. Other awareness events include National Infant Loss month in October, specifically commemorated by Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day on October 15.<sup>174</sup> Communities may have run/walks in their vicinity that support pregnancy loss awareness.

On an individual level the pastor will certainly want to inform the couple who has just lost a child that he will be praying for them personally and, if they wish, can ask others in the congregation to pray for them as well. To this one pastor also adds, “I would ask if it would be comforting to have a public prayer in church to ask for God’s comfort for the grieving family.” In our worships services it is also important to remember to include general prayers for pregnant mothers and their unborn children, perhaps on Mother’s Day.

The matter of prayer also has a bearing on the question of how soon newly pregnant parents should reveal the news that they are pregnant. If the pastor happens to be one of the first to hear about a couple’s new pregnancy, he may want to gently encourage them to share this joyful news with others. Of course this decision ultimately falls on the parents themselves and the pastor will not want to be intrusive or forceful, but there are several good reasons for not keeping the news of pregnancy hidden for an unnecessary length of time. Parents today often feel it is best to wait to tell anyone about their pregnancy until after the first trimester, when pregnancy loss is far less common.<sup>175</sup> In cases of pregnancy loss, however, it only becomes all the more difficult to inform others of your loss when they were not even aware of the pregnancy in the first place. If anything, the potential for pregnancy loss speaks to why they would want to tell others the news soon after they are sure of their pregnancy. It is in those first months when the baby is at the highest risk that he or she most needs the prayers of others. Furthermore, this is a time for rejoicing over the blessing of a new life, their new child, not for waiting until the “coast is clear” and they do not have to worry as much about their baby. Pastors may want to

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<sup>172</sup> *Pastoral Care*, 117.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Seaton, “A Grief Unobserved,” 43.

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.october15th.com/>

<sup>175</sup> McLaren, “Polite society’s last taboo.”

have this discussion with newly pregnant parents so that they can have as many saints as possible assaulting the throne of God with prayers on behalf of this child and mother.<sup>176</sup>

When considering the significance of raising awareness, it is encouraging to look at examples of others, even from other cultures. One hospital in Ontario, Canada, has made significant changes to their policies of supportive care for patients who suffer an unexpected pregnancy loss. This hospital now gives much more consideration and attention to how it treats the remains of these young children. Through ongoing pastoral, staff, and public education regarding pregnancy loss they have noted great feedback from the community.<sup>177</sup> For proof that the status quo in our country does not have to remain, one could look to a culture like Japan, where, though combined with idolatrous practices, there is no taboo surrounding pregnancy loss as in the West. As Jenny Schroedel says: “In Japan, this grief is not hidden out of sight. It is not borne exclusively by the mother, but also by siblings, by extended family, and by entire communities.”<sup>178</sup>

### ***Concrete Practices – Rites, Ceremonies, and Memorial Acts***

In connection with this general awareness comes the importance of what Barrett calls “concrete practices,” by which she means worship rites, memorial acts and tokens of remembrance.<sup>179</sup> She sees these as having a significant impact on believers who cope with pregnancy loss for several reasons: “First,” Barrett says, “concrete practices *reflect the reality of our loss*...Second, [they] *give us and others memories of the lives we’ve lost*...Finally, [they]

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<sup>176</sup> One contemporary example of the benefit of revealing the news of pregnancy as early as possible is Jill Duggar from TV’s “19 Kids and Counting.” She and her husband announced their pregnancy only two months after their marriage, stating: “Understanding that the majority of miscarriages happen within the first trimester, and believing that every life is precious no matter how young, we decided to share our joyful news as soon as we could.” The writer of the article comments: “[Duggar’s statement] demonstrates a genuine respect and acknowledgement of life that those who consider themselves pro-life might want to consider.” Ericka Anderson, “She Announced Her Pregnancy Way Before 12 Weeks. Why More Women Should Consider Doing The Same,” *The Daily Signal*, September 4, 2014, <http://dailysignal.com/2014/09/04/announced-pregnancy-way-12-weeks-women-consider/> (accessed on December 2, 2014).

<sup>177</sup> Elaine Walker, “Acknowledging Parents’ Grief in Early Pregnancy Loss.” *Chaplaincy Today* 19: no.1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 37-39.

<sup>178</sup> Jenny Schroedel, *Naming the Child: Hope-Filled Reflections on Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Death* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009), 15.

<sup>179</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 131.

*give us an opportunity to turn things over to God, formally, directly, as well as to receive testimony to hope and to God's love.*"<sup>180</sup>

As with the death of any Christian, a funeral service or other ceremony will aid the grieving process and help believers gain closure. And as with all mourning of death, these rites and ceremonies are intended to benefit the survivors, not the departed child. For that reason pastors should be aware of the controversy surrounding pastoral care for the stillborn.<sup>181</sup> Some parents ask for their stillborn baby to be baptized, and many clergy have complied, whether willingly or with hesitation. In fact, of all the sources researched for this paper that brought up the issue, few outright rejected this practice.<sup>182</sup> It is sufficient to say that Lutheran pastors who hold to the doctrine of baptism as taught in Scripture will know that baptism is for the living, and not the dead.<sup>183</sup> Yet an awareness of this issue will at least prepare a pastor for the reactions he may get when he refuses to baptize a stillborn child.

Another issue that parents may be unprepared for is what will happen to the bodily remains of their baby, and they may be surprised to learn that the remains of most miscarried and aborted infants "are buried or cremated by the hospital."<sup>184</sup> Especially with miscarriage parents may not realize that they might have the option to ask for their remains, and they can be left with guilt and questions at wondering if their baby was simply disposed of like garbage. If a pastor is prepared for this he can inform otherwise unaware parents of these matters. He will also want to be prepared to perform a burial for the child or other ceremonial service for the grieving parents just as he would for other believers. There are several Lutheran resources that have been produced over the years, and pastors may use part or all of these worship rites available to him as he ministers in cases of pregnancy loss.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 131-132, emphasis original.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Susan F. Zengerle, "The controversy over pastoral care of parents after a stillbirth." *Journal Of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 61, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 243-246.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 116-117.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Otto E. Sohn, *What's The Answer?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 31. Sohn says that "to our knowledge such practice has never been sanctioned by our church. Nor should it be sanctioned. The means of grace, including Baptism, are for the living only. (Heb. 9:27)."

<sup>184</sup> Seaton, "A Grief Unobserved," 41.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Appendix E for several of the rites that have been used by Lutherans in the past and are currently available today.

On a more personal level there are a number of suggestions the pastor may want to give to help grievors remember their child. Maybe the most helpful and most important suggestion is to name their child. Some may find this an odd practice and comment accordingly, but pastors can offer gentle correction that, in view of everything God's word says about this child, there is no more fitting practice than to give every child a name by which the parents can remember him or her. This child is their child, no matter how early they lost him or her. On the matter of picking a name P. Schwiebert and P. Kirk state: "Names are important. You will use the name as you talk about this little person to others. You will use it as you tell your other children about this special child in your life. You will find it easier to connect your memories to this child if you can refer to him or her by name."<sup>186</sup>

The idea of memorial acts by which parents can remember their child is a further suggestion that a pastor can bring up. Parents might place flowers on the altar annually in remembrance of their child or choose to donate money they would have spent on their child and give it to a worthy cause. Mementos like jewelry, figurines, plaques, ultrasound photos, and so on, can provide further aid to parents as they strive to remember the life of their child as that of a real person and as one of their own.<sup>187</sup>

### ***The Need for Long-Term Ministry***

Even if many of the suggestions and options mentioned above are given to the survivors of pregnancy loss, pastors should realize this does not mean his ministry to them is a short-term matter. Some degree of grief in pregnancy loss often remains with survivors for the rest of their lives.<sup>188</sup> Though this ministry will usually not be as intense as the initial care needed, he will not want to forget their loss, just as they will not forget it. One WELS pastor said that he "would check in personally with the family within a week of the death to see how the family is doing, then in 3 weeks and in 6 weeks."

Related to this is the matter of anniversaries and special milestones to keep in mind. With the loss of a miscarriage the anticipated due-date may be especially difficult for parents. Future

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<sup>186</sup> Quoted in Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 120.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Appendix F for Barret's list of memorial acts.

<sup>188</sup> Leis-Newman, "Miscarriage and loss." Barrett advises "Be prepared for your grief to rise up and ambush you, months or even years after you think you should be done working through it." *What Was Lost*, 118.

anniversaries, either of the day the child died or it would have been born, may be an appropriate time for the pastor to check up on them, reminding them he cares and considers their child to be a person. Other important dates can be holidays. For those who have no other children, Mother's or Father's Day may be especially hard in that they themselves may be doubting their own parenthood.<sup>189</sup> In addition, others may not acknowledge them as parents, either by not knowing of their loss or by rejecting the notion that they are "real parents" because they have no living children. The pastor will not want to exclude them in the celebration of that day even if many others might.

The pastor should be aware of how the parents are faring in their conversations with others. One of the more surprising issues parents may need support with is numbering their children. Since some of the most common questions couples are asked would be: "Do you have any kids? How many children do you have?" parents may contemplate how they should respond in these situations. Parents may feel guilty for leaving out of their count those children lost during pregnancy, and so they will answer honestly. Yet many people do not understand why these children should be counted. This can be a particularly tough situation for those who have lost a child in their first pregnancy. One suggestion this writer has heard is "I have two children, but only one to hold." This both is honest and creates an opportunity to share their story about the child they love but who is no longer with them. The point is that the pastor will want to be able to provide support and possibly even suggest potential responses.<sup>190</sup>

As parents move on the pastor will want to be aware of the challenges confronting future pregnancies. Parents may be fearful of trying to become pregnant again and may still be wrestling with the grief of their loss. They may hesitate to invest themselves in any following pregnancies for fear of losing this child as well.<sup>191</sup> One health writer, Laura Tedesco, relates the mixed emotions she and other mothers feel at becoming pregnant again after a miscarriage. She describes the constant fear and anxiety she felt as "Doctor's appointments became my lifeline—a chance to hear my child's heartbeat and know that I had one more day with her, at least. I stopped exercising out of a fear that I might somehow jostle the baby, even though my doctors

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<sup>189</sup> Gamino and Cooney, *When Your Baby Dies*, 42, 46.

<sup>190</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 134-135.

<sup>191</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 123.

reassured me that physical activity was perfectly safe.”<sup>192</sup> Moe notes that there is no strict formula to follow regarding how soon after pregnancy loss parents may want to try again. But it may be helpful to remind parents that they will never be completely ready.<sup>193</sup> No child can replace the one they already lost, but Tedesco provides hope to parents who are looking to try again:

The good news: Becoming pregnant again can actually help you heal after a miscarriage. ‘We used to recommend that people wait [to become pregnant again] until their grieving is complete,’ said Galst. First, I don’t think you’re ever done grieving. But also, the experience of being able to be pregnant again – and deliver a healthy baby – is extraordinarily healing.”<sup>194</sup>

In view of the insensitivity of a world that will expect them to move on with life or just get over it, the pastor may be one of the few important people who can serve as a fixture in their life, pointing them to God’s promises about their child and to the value of this life just as any other.<sup>195</sup> This can bring pressure upon pastors to be fully equipped to deal with every difficulty that pregnancy loss presents. But it is also helpful to keep in mind what one WELS pastor said: “I have discovered that the level of ministry that people need and wanted varied so much. I could err by forcing myself in and demanding that we have a meeting. And I could err by not contacting them enough or having a prayer in church.” In general pastors will want to follow the lead of those he is ministering to as he evaluates their emotions and reactions.

In connection with this, pastors should be careful not to force themselves upon grieving parents. With all their preparation in hand, pastors may be tempted to think they know exactly what mourning parents will need in any situation. But only the parents themselves can tell them that. That is why above all else it will be important for pastors to simply listen.<sup>196</sup> One WELS pastor gave this recommendation: “Don’t force yourself into their situation or overshepherd

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<sup>192</sup> Tedesco, “How My Miscarriage Changed My Next Pregnancy.”

<sup>193</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 133.

<sup>194</sup> Tedesco, “How My Miscarriage Changed My Next Pregnancy.” Joann Paley Galst is a psychologist who specializes in pregnancy loss.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Seaton, 41: “Because the pastor may be one of the few individuals whom parents inform that a pregnancy has ended, members of the clergy have the unique opportunity to care for families in their loss, speak the gospel, suggest ways of remembering the child’s brief existence, and point out additional support services.”

<sup>196</sup> One WELS pastor had this to say: “Don’t talk, just listen. Don’t pretend to understand what you can’t understand.”

them. I think that's the biggest mistake I've seen." Moe also commends the benefits of giving options to the family.<sup>197</sup>

In addition to remaining firmly planted in God's word, one of the most powerful tools at a pastor's disposal will be prayer. A WELS pastor advises, "Pray like you have never prayed before." Among other things, a pastor can pray that God would equip him with the patience, compassion and wisdom to love his sheep with a self-sacrificing love, just as he first loved us. The pastor can pray that he and his people would learn to thank God for every day he has given to their children, even before birth, and for every day they have been blessed to enjoy this precious gift of life God has given to them.

If the loss of a child before birth does strike any Christian, the pastor can comfort believers suffering pregnancy loss by pointing them to God's mercy and grace in even giving them a child, no matter how brief this was. He can point them back to whatever happy memories they may have had of this child – the day they first learned about his or her existence, the day they first saw the ultrasound or heard a heartbeat, the day they first felt the child move or kick. These will not only remind them of God's blessings in the midst of tragedy, it will affirm for them the truth that this child is *their* child, a child they dearly love, a child God dearly loves.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to show that pregnancy loss is a real concern for pastors everywhere, because pregnancy loss is a reality everywhere for them and the people they serve. This concern ought to lead pastors to prepare themselves with the knowledge and skills needed to care for grieving Christians when so many others might reject or offend them. Even though pastors may feel helpless at times as they minister in these situations, proper preparation will make them better able to console grieving parents with God's word and help them on the road to recovery.

At the same time I do not presume to have covered every issue that pertains to pregnancy loss. I merely hope to have provided pastors and others with a solid foundation in Scripture and the world we live in, so that they can branch out and grow even more in this subject. One of the avenues that I did not have the opportunity to pursue in this research is that of conducting

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<sup>197</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 114-115.

specific case studies or personal interviews of laypeople, doctors, nurses, counselors, and other persons who have either experienced or treated pregnancy loss firsthand. Even though one can easily find these firsthand accounts through the media, nothing can replace the benefit of face to face contact and conversation, especially with such a personal subject. It may make research more emotionally taxing, but this kind of research can also produce results that are all the more rewarding.<sup>198</sup>

Another area that merits attention is how to apply these principles when dealing with unbelievers. Pastors may not be able to offer the same comfort and hope to them as to believers, but this does not mean that we deny the possibility of any hope or that we do not strive to serve their emotional and spiritual needs as much as is appropriate for each situation. At the least their pregnancy loss can be used as an occasion to share the gospel and to proclaim to them how God is calling them to faith even in the midst of suffering.

On a similar note it would be interesting to consider how pastors might take the truths presented here and apply them to those who have had an abortion. More research could also be done to compare the intersection of abortion and miscarriage/stillbirth. Are there more reasons why the former receives far more attention than the latter?

Further research remains to be done in comparing how Christians have historically and practically dealt with the question of pregnancy loss, infant faith, and infant salvation.<sup>199</sup> This research would likely be fruitful in many ways, as Erickson observes, “[This question] is a real test of how we do our theology, for it is one of those areas where we have very little explicit statement in Scripture, and yet is an area where important doctrines intersect.”<sup>200</sup> This would be especially useful in comparing the Lutheran approaches to this matter, since today Lutherans seem to be taking more divergent approaches than has historically been the case.<sup>201</sup>

Finally, it is my prayer that all who have taken the time to read these pages may come away with a greater grasp of the amazing blessings God has given to us in our precious children and in our fellowship as the body of Christ. May we always remember and cherish the greatest

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<sup>198</sup> Moe, *Pastoral Care*, 12.

<sup>199</sup> Sanders, *No Other Name*, 305.

<sup>200</sup> Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved?*, 235.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Appendix A. One example of using the question of the salvation of unbaptized infants as a platform for examining the Lutheran approach to theology is Jack D. Kilcrease, III, “The Salvation of the Unbaptized in Gerhard and Chemnitz.” *Logia* 16, no. 4 (January 1, 2007): 29-36.



gift God has given us in the Son who gave himself for us so that we might become his children. In the words of the disciple whom Jesus loved: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 Jn 3:1)

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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## 7. Appendices

### *Appendix A: Historical Overview of the Lutheran Teaching on Unbaptized Infants*

This historical overview is intended to provide a greater awareness of how the questions about the salvation of unbaptized infants and pregnancy loss ministry have been approached within the Lutheran church over the centuries. For the most part I will simply allow these Lutherans to speak for themselves, offering some comments when necessary.

#### *Luther and Bugenhagen*

Martin Luther is naturally one of the first places Lutherans will look to when considering the traditional position of Lutherans on the question of unbaptized infants. Luther's commentary on Genesis serves as a good starting point for this purpose. Luther asks, "If the uncircumcised males of the Jews are lost, what is one to conclude about infants who died before the eighth day?...Likewise, what about our own infants, either those who are stillborn or those who die shortly after birth, before they are baptized?"<sup>202</sup> Luther goes on to say,

Concerning infants who died before the eighth day the answer is easy, just as it is easy to give an answer about our own infants who die before Baptism. For they do not sin against the covenant of circumcision or of Baptism. Since the Law commands them to be circumcised on the eighth day, could God condemn those who die before the eighth day?

Accordingly, the souls of those infants must be left to the will of the Heavenly Father, whom we know to be merciful. Furthermore, what Paul says in a gentle manner about 'those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam' (Rom. 5:14) and about Jacob and Esau – 'though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad' (Rom. 9:11) – holds true in their case too.

Even though infants bring with them inborn sin, which we call original sin, it is nevertheless important that they have committed no sin against the Law. Since God is by nature merciful, He will not let their condition be worse because they were unable to obtain circumcision in the Old Testament or Baptism in the New Testament."<sup>203</sup>

Later on, commenting on 17:14 and its application to infants dying before the eighth day, Luther says,

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<sup>202</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20, Volume 3*, 103.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.



This statement, as we have also pointed out above, does not involve infants who died before the eighth day. Even though they have original sin, a merciful God will nevertheless find a way to deliver them, just as He does with other sinners. But so far as this threat is concerned, they are delivered from it, because they have committed no sin against the law of circumcision. There remains in them the guilt of birth or of original sin and no guilt so far as circumcision is concerned.<sup>204</sup>

Yet Luther also cautions against debating about the uncertain and the unknown. He emphasizes that “we must stay with the Word; there we must hear what He promises us and what He threatens.”<sup>205</sup> He sees in Adam’s fall and the sin of Lucifer this too curious attitude of wishing to know what God keeps hidden. Luther concludes that “we should restrain our curiosity and remain within the definite bounds that are placed before us by God.”<sup>206</sup>

In connection with this it is interesting to look at the following statement of Luther that occurs even later on in his comments on Genesis 17. Interestingly, I have not come across any Lutherans who quote the following words of Luther when discussing Luther’s view of unbaptized infants:

As to the question which has been raised about infants who died before the eighth day I know this: that they are not condemned by this law concerning circumcision. But my answer to the question what God does with them is that I know that I do not know. If they became eight days old and were not circumcised, they would not belong to the people of God. But when they die before the eighth day, this is a matter of God’s judgment, of which I have no knowledge; it is beyond me, except that I know that God is merciful. This good thing God wanted me to know, for He informs me to this effect in His Word. But He did not want me to know the other things.<sup>207</sup>

In looking at Luther’s most famous statement on the question of unbaptized infants, *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage*, one can see how this work would fit with his Genesis commentary.<sup>208</sup> If one reads over this writing, one will notice Luther certainly gives strong comfort to grieving mothers who have lost a child at no fault of their own. In view of these comments from Genesis there would seem to be room for the interpretation that Luther is

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 143-144.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 140

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Appendix B for this writing in full.

here reserving judgment about unbaptized infants, though he still offers very strong comfort and hope. At the same time, however, here Luther does emphasize the power of prayer made on the behalf of others. Luther is confident that God hears such prayers made for these unbaptized infants. In what seems to contradict his Genesis commentary, though, Luther speaks with more confidence about uncircumcised infants who died before the eighth day: “Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcised on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents in view of the promise that God willed to be their God. God (they say) has not limited his power to the sacraments, but has made a covenant with us through his word.”<sup>209</sup>

Any examination of this famous little writing by Luther needs to be understood within the proper context. As it is noted in the introduction of the *American Edition*, this work was appended to a commentary on Psalm 29 by Luther’s fellow reformer and own pastor, Johann Bugenhagen. LCMS pastor Karl Hess notes, however, that this introduction “obscures the way Luther comforted those Christians who had lost children prior to baptism.”<sup>210</sup> The *American Edition* introduction makes it seem as if Bugenhagen chose to remain silent on the question of unbaptized infants and wanted Luther to write something on this question instead. But Hess points out that Luther’s work was appended to Bugenhagen’s commentary on the Psalms with the specific intention of addressing those women who thought Bugenhagen’s comfort did not apply to them, because they were unsure if they had committed their child to Christ in prayer. Bugenhagen introduces the occasion for which Luther first wrote his work, which has now become more famous than Bugenhagen’s writing to which it was appended<sup>211</sup>:

When I had written this concerning the little children I gave it to our dear father Doctor Martin Luther, and he was well-pleased that he had told me before that I should write it. He wanted me also to set down at the end a comfort for women for whom before now it had gone badly in childbirth, and who would think that in this distress [of labor pains]

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<sup>209</sup> Luther, *Devotional Writings II, Volume 43*, 249.

<sup>210</sup> Hess, “The Faith of Unbaptized Infants,” 32.

<sup>211</sup> It should be noted, however, that Bugenhagen’s book was more widespread and well-known in his own day. Already in 1544, this book was listed in the church order for the city of Hildesheim as recommended reading, along with Luther’s Postills and Galatians Commentary and Melancthon’s *Loci*, Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and Commentary on Romans. Emil Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts, VII/2/1, Niedersachsen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1902-2011), 839. Writing about a century later, Johann Gerhard also recommended Bugenhagen’s book in his treatment of this question in his *Locorum Theologicorum Tomus Nonus*, 284.

they had not prayed nor commended the matter to God. Because it was certain (even if they did not know, in such fear, that they were praying) that with unspeakable sighs they had prayed, and that they would gladly have given up their own lives in order that their poor little child might have been baptized. And that prayer is sufficient if indeed there were no other.<sup>212</sup>

What, then, did Bugenhagen teach about the unbaptized infants of believers? That position has been shown above in the Scripture section, where Bugenhagen is quoted at length.<sup>213</sup> Bugenhagen puts this question in the context of the pastoral office and its responsibilities. He emphasizes the need for pastors to be prepared to “counsel poor sinners, before God, in all grievous matters to which they have no solution and [without which they will] otherwise despair and come to ruin.”<sup>214</sup> For this reason, Bugenhagen felt compelled to write *On Unborn Children*.

Bugenhagen also responds to some Anabaptists who would commend this question to the “secret judgment of God” because they did not believe Scripture said anything definitive on this question. Regarding such uncertainty Bugenhagen has this to say, “Thus the devil desires that we should put away God’s gracious promise from our eyes and grope around in the darkness with God’s secret judgments.”<sup>215</sup> Instead, Christ receives our children brought to him in prayer, as promised in Mark 10,

Here we have a gracious verdict, secure and certain: “Let the little children come to me,” etc. We will not allow this to be taken away from us. It is not talking about God’s secret judgment or some dark delusion, but instead God’s gracious pledge that the kingdom of heaven is our children’s own possession. But only those who will be brought to Christ, because without Christ there is no salvation. Therefore Jewish and Turkish children are not saved, because they will not be brought to Christ.<sup>216</sup>

Furthermore, Hess notes that Bugenhagen, though he had several opportunities to do so, does not take the approach common to many Lutherans today, that of pointing believers to the word heard in the womb. Hess observes: “If Bugenhagen believes that infants receive faith prior

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. above, p 30.

<sup>214</sup> Hess, “The Faith of Unbaptized Infants,” 33.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

to baptism by means of hearing the word, he is silent about it here.”<sup>217</sup> Bugenhagen does actually emphasize the power of the word, but rather than an external word spoken to the unborn he looks to the word Christ spoke about these infants:

But to Christ be thanks in eternity, who has given such a promise to us about little children without the addition of Holy Baptism, so that we can also receive the promise for our children, who are still in their mother’s womb. [Jesus] says only that of those children who will be brought to him is the kingdom of heaven. Now we can also bring the little children who are still in their mother’s womb to Christ with our prayer, as has been said already. Thus the kingdom of heaven is also of these children; that is, they will be received by Christ according to his promise, baptized with the Holy Spirit, and have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ. What else should that be called but the kingdom of heaven?<sup>218</sup>

Returning to Luther, his approval and association with Bugenhagen’s work is strong evidence that Luther stood alongside Bugenhagen in stating this is not a question that ought to be left up to God’s hidden will. Further evidence of this is a quote from Charles Porterfield Krauth, who cites Luther and Bugenhagen elsewhere on the issue of Christian burial for unbaptized infants of believers: “We bury them as Christians, confessing thereby that we believe the strong assurances of Christ. The bodies of these unbaptized children have part in the joyous resurrection of life.”<sup>219</sup> Finally, the Baier-Walther *Compendium* also includes a statement by Luther that expresses the belief that the unbaptized infants of believers are saved. Luther is cited as stating in a church postil on Mark 16:16:

Hence, this text must be understood so as to enjoin and sanction baptism as a thing that is to be used and not despised, as I stated; and yet it must not be explained so narrowly that any person who has not been able to obtain baptism stands condemned by it. And briefly, you can gather from this text these four propositions: 1) there are some who believe and are baptized; this is in accord with the general command and rule of Christ, which we must teach and keep; 2) there are some who believe and are not baptized; 3) there are some who do not believe, and yet are baptized; 4) there are some who neither believe nor are baptized. These distinct classes the text itself suggests. The common consensus of opinion has ever been that if a person dies a believer, though unbaptized, he would not be condemned, for a case like this might happen that a person is a believer, and though

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 35; cf. also 40.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>219</sup> C.P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), 433.

desiring baptism, he is overtaken by a sudden death, as happens occasionally in the case of infants before, during or after their birth. Now, these infants had been previously offered and commended to Christ by faith and prayers of their parents or other people, and in accordance with His promise: ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me,’ etc. – He no doubt receives them.”<sup>220</sup>

We have taken such an in-depth look at Luther not only because he is Luther, but also because almost every Lutheran after Luther cites him as support for their view. This overview of Luther himself may help us understand why all later Lutherans can cite Luther and still end up with different approaches. At times Luther seems to speak quite strongly in favor of remaining silent on this question, while at other times he seems to lean rather heavily toward regarding as saved the unbaptized infants of Christians who have died. In conjunction with what will be discussed below, most of the Lutherans in subsequent centuries interpret his *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage* to say that we should treat these children as saved.<sup>221</sup> On the other hand, a number of more recent Lutherans read this document as Luther saying that we have hope for their salvation, but Scripture is ultimately silent about them. Consider, for example the following statement from Joy Schroeder about Luther’s treatise:

Thus, in a pastoral response to the anguish of mothers who suffered miscarriage or whose babies were stillborn, Martin Luther had asserted that God *might* accept the mother’s desire for the unborn child’s eventual baptism as an unspoken but heartfelt prayer. He said that “it is to be hoped” that a merciful God might have mercy on the child for the sake of this prayer. Though his attempts to comfort mothers express hope, Luther is somewhat cautious in his assertions—perhaps because he does not find a clear and distinct promise about it in Scripture.<sup>222</sup>

The debate over what Luther actually taught on this issue will likely continue, but this overview will hopefully provide a solid starting point for this discussion.

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<sup>220</sup> Church Postil. Halle, XI 1332 ff. Translation taken from William H. T. Dau, *Lectures on Graebner’s Outlines of Doctrinal Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeo Company, no date), 59-60.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Friedemann Bechmann, *Theologia Conscientiaria* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Meyer & Bachmann, 1692), 183-186, for one example of this interpretation of Luther.

<sup>222</sup> Joy Schroeder, “The Prenatal Theology of Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg.” *Lutheran Forum* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 54.

### *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*

As we move on to the generations after Luther, we find Lutherans following the same line of thinking as Bugenhagen and Luther, pointing to God's promises about the children of believers and the promise to hear the prayer of believers on behalf of their unborn children. But Jack Kilcrease points out one important difference among many Lutherans. He reveals that Gerhard, and I will add many Lutherans after him, tended to go beyond revelation and to appeal to the universal mercy of God more than one ought to. In his *Enchiridion*, Chemnitz offers a concise and comforting statement on the salvation of unbaptized infants of believers which was quoted above. Kilcrease commends Chemnitz's pastoral approach and says: "The logic of Chemnitz's answer is clear. Pastorally and theologically, the problem of the death of unbaptized infants must be dealt with in terms of the proclamation of the gospel as a promise."<sup>223</sup>

In Johann Gerhard's *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, Kilcrease observes that Gerhard takes the same pastoral approach in offering bereaved parents comfort.<sup>224</sup> However, according to Kilcrease, Gerhard also strays beyond God's revelation when he appeals to God's general goodness and speculates that God would not allow certain infants killed in Scripture to be lost. For example, Gerhard looks at the babies of Bethlehem murdered by Herod and concludes:

In Matthew 2:16 Herod allowed to be murdered all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years and under. Without doubt, among these were certain ones who had not yet attained eight days of age and thus died without circumcision. But who would on account of that exclude them from God's kingdom? Much rather they are blessed little souls, quite secure little ones, little diamonds of the martyrs."<sup>225</sup>

As Kilcrease explains, Gerhard takes God's universal promises of mercy and without warrant also applies them in situations in which God has not promised to do so. Kilcrease goes to great length to explain that Gerhard was most likely led to this through the influence of various scholastic methodologies and philosophies, leading him to depart from the Lutheran paradigm of

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<sup>223</sup> Kilcrease, "The Salvation of the Unbaptized," 30.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. One should note that Gerhard takes basically the same approach to this question in his *Locorum Theologicorum Tomus Nonus*, 279-290, in which he also refers to several of Luther's writings and Bugenhagen's work on Psalm 29. Cf. also his *Confessionis Catholicae...Libri II Specialis Pars Secunda* (Jena: Ernest Steinmann, 1636), 885-905.

<sup>225</sup> Kilcrease, "The Salvation of the Unbaptized," 31.

allowing God to remain hidden where he has not revealed himself. This difference between Chemnitz and Gerhard, however, should not be taken to mean that they taught differently regarding the actual fate of unbaptized infants.<sup>226</sup> In his conclusion Kilcrease states

As Chemnitz shows, the promises that God offers in Scripture concerning the dead infants represent a sufficient means to give both assurance and pastoral care to grieving parents. The question between Chemnitz and Gerhard is therefore not whether or not we can believe in the salvation of unbaptized infants, but how and why we posit it. According to the Lutheran paradigm, we must always prioritize the promises of God over speculation about general divine goodness.<sup>227</sup>

A search through the writings of other Lutheran dogmaticians from the Post-Reformation era reveals that they took a similar approach to this question.<sup>228</sup> But this teaching also made its way down to the level of the parish, and thereby the laity, as pastors wrestled with the practical matters of ministering to parents during pregnancy loss.

One of these practical sources can be found in the Lutheran theologian Friedrich Balduin. In his *Shining Treatise on Cases of Conscience* Balduin looks to Genesis 17:7 and concludes, “Should pious parents, therefore, not consider their own seed to be the seed of Abraham, to whom the promise has also been made? May they not also consider that God will have concern for that seed, lest it perish, especially if it has been deprived chiefly of the ordinary means of salvation? May they not consider that some other reason or mode of procuring our salvation may be prescribed by God?”<sup>229</sup> It is also interesting to note that Balduin takes this opportunity to

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<sup>226</sup> As Kilcrease could be mistaken to mean when he says, “These two theologians [Gerhard and Chemnitz] disagree about the salvation of unbaptized infants,” “The Salvation of the Unbaptized,” 29.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Jaspas Rasmussen Brochmand, *Universae Theologiae Systema* (Frankfurt and Ulm: Görilin, 1658 and 1664), tom. I, 187-188; tom. II, 441, 592, 650. Abraham Calov, *Exegema Augustanae Confessionis*, art. IX, cap. II., thes. 6-10 (Wittenberg: Johann Borckhard, 1665). Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *Hodosophia Christiana seu Theologia Positiva* (Strassbourg: Frederick Spoor, 1649), 724-729. Johann Deutschmann, *Disquisitio Theologica de Salute Infantum Praecipue vero Christianorum sine Baptismo Decedentium* (Wittenberg: Johann Borckhard, 1663). Johann Ernst Gerhard, *Disquisitio Theologica De Salute Infantum ante Baptismum Decedentium* (Jena: Johann Nisius, 1660). Jacob Heerbrand, *Compendium Theologiae* (Tübingen: Georg Gruppenbach, 1573), 603-609. Gottfried Hoffmann, *Synopsis Theologiae* (Tübingen: Charles Theophil Ebert, 1730), 864-868. David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, (Leipzig, B.C. Breitkopf et Fil., 1763): 1098-1100. Johann Michael Lorenz, *Dissertatio Theologica de Salute Infantum non Baptizatorum* (Strassbourg: Simon Kuersner, 1733). Balthasar Meisner, *Anthropologia Sacra I* (Montebeliard: Paul Ledertz, 1619), 246-270. Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, pars IV, cap. V, qu. X, (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1702), 164-169.

<sup>229</sup> Friedrich Balduin, “Concerning Cases of Conscience Regarding the Use of the Sacraments and, in Specific, Baptism,” trans. Wade Johnston, WLS Essay File, accessed 1 October 2014; available at <http://www.wlssays.net/node/3950>; 19.

remind parents that their children are a gift of God and the work of his hands.<sup>230</sup> Balduin recommends to pastors who minister to parents:

Therefore, while an infant is still gestating in the womb, let parents know the gift with which their marriage has been blessed, that very clear honor that has been granted to them as a mother and father... First of all, however, let them invoke God with most ardent prayers so that he himself may have concern for the work of his hands and guard the infant in the womb and that he may by means of sanctification cleanse well from its sin that infant who has been conceived in sin, making it his son, receiving it in grace into his covenant, and effecting for it the eternal life for which it has been created. God does not permit these prayers to be void. In fact, he himself commands them and promises to hear them favorably (Psalm 50:15; 145:18; Matthew 18:19, 21, 22; John 16:23). They are, so to speak, the hand by which infants are offered to God.<sup>231</sup>

In addition to practical works aimed at pastors such as this, one will also find topic-specific pastoral handbooks that address this issue. One Lutheran pastor, Christoph Barbarossa, spends some time on this issue and is one of the few instances of a Lutheran from this era who bases his position on the example of John the Baptist in the womb, though he does not elaborate on how exactly they believe. He concludes: “For on the Last Day they, along with other believing Christians, will come out of their graves alive and will live and remain in eternity with their parents. Now what is there that parents should so severely worry and trouble themselves?”<sup>232</sup> Another Lutheran, Thomas Günther, discusses this question in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of his *A Booklet of Comfort for Pregnant and Bearing Women*. He describes fifteen reasons why believing parents should not doubt that their children are saved, many of which have already been presented above. To this chapter he also has an addendum dealing with Bugenhagen’s booklet and some common objections to this Lutheran position.<sup>233</sup>

Some writings were specifically directed to the laity. Lutheran professor and pastor in Copenhagen, Johann Lassenius, wrote a devotional book in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century that addressed Christians bearing all kinds of crosses and afflictions. In it he offered comfort to mothers who were doubting the salvation of their children who had died before receiving baptism:

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>232</sup> Christoph Barbarossa, *Creutz und Trostspiegel / Für all Christliche unnd Gottselige Eheleut* (Leipzig: Jakob Schuerer, 1599), 280-282.

<sup>233</sup> Thomas Günther, *Ein Trostbüchlein für die Schwangern und Geberenden Weiber* (Frankfurt: Sigmund Feierabend, 1564), 196-209.



If you think that God cannot also do without water what he otherwise promised to believers through water and the Holy Spirit, then you would be making your God much too powerless. You had your child brought to your dear God through your own and the Christian congregation's prayer; you prayed for it, when it still rested below your heart; you procreated it in your chaste marriage bed. It was bound within the covenant of believers as the seed of Abraham, which would be gradually born over so many hundreds of years later, of which God still said that he already was and wanted to be their Father...I ask you, for Christ's sake: free yourself from these unnecessary thoughts and do not be like Rachel, who would not let herself be comforted (Jer 21:15; Mt 2:18). Your child is with God, and on that Day you shall find it with him who purchased and redeemed it, as all other people, with his blood.<sup>234</sup>

I was also able to find two Lutheran sermons for unbaptized infants from this time period. One is by the famous Lutheran hymn writer, Johann Heermann. In 1623 he preached on John 3:5 a sermon bearing the title, "Foundational Comfort and Comforting Foundation on which the Doctrine of the Salvation of the Unbaptized Children of Christians is Built."<sup>235</sup> Balthasar Meisner also preached a sermon for a stillborn infant girl in which he reminded his hearers that, in view of Christ's words in Luke 21:23, such events were signs that the end of the world is near. Yet he concludes by reminding parents that their pain also means that drawing ever closer is "the day of reviving and rebuilding all things [*Dies refrigerii & restitutionis omnium*], when every father will receive back his son, and every mother her daughter, and they will see their children among the angels of God and hear them singing, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is our God, the Lord of Hosts.'" <sup>236</sup>

Finally, throughout Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century one finds this approach consistently among the various church orders, which would lay out the guidelines and instructions for how Lutheran pastors were to conduct their ministries within their respective territories. Most often the instructions concerning unbaptized infants would be considered in regard to funeral and burial rites. In contrast to what the Catholic Church at that time was practicing, as it had for centuries – the limbo of infants – we find the Lutheran churches advising

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<sup>234</sup> Johann Lassenius, *Zwei und achtzig Kurze Trostreden an Angefochtene aller Art... Genommen aus dessen herrlicher Trostschrift: "Das betrübte und von GOtt reichlich getröstete Ephraim,"* (St. Louis: L. Volkening, 1861), 270-271.

<sup>235</sup> Johann Heermann, *Die erste Leich-Predigt... Grundfester Trost / und Trostfester Grund / darauff die Lehre von der Seligkeit ungetauffter Christen-Kinderlein erbawet wird* (Leipzig: Henning, 1636).

<sup>236</sup> Balthasar Meisner, *Noch eine Leichpredigt / Bey dem Begrebnüs eines ungetaufften Kindleins* (Dresden, Germany: Matthes Stöckel, 1602).

pastors to bury unbaptized infants along with other believers.<sup>237</sup> Other church orders indicate the same type of instruction and comfort as one finds in other contemporaneous sources, particularly citing Genesis 17:7 as words of comfort to be offered.<sup>238</sup> Some regions, however, strangely advised that a pastor need not be present to officiate the burial, since the child had not “been engrafted to the church through the outward office” [i.e., baptism], though they claim this practice was not meant to cast doubt on the child’s salvation.<sup>239</sup>

These church orders also reveal that this was an issue which pastors were expected to be knowledgeable about and prepared for. In the town of Limburg in western Germany the visitation questions from the year 1610 concerned the ceremonies one should use at the burial of an unbaptized child and how the pastor should instruct parents regarding their children who die suddenly without baptism.<sup>240</sup> Superintendents (supervising pastors for larger territories) in the region of Palatine Neuberg were directed by a 1576 church order to carefully advise every pastor within their territory that, when they minister to parents grieving the loss of a child who died before baptism, they should

Instruct and comfort distressed parents, but especially the wives, with good basis from God’s word and from his divine promise given to the child, that even though the Almighty God did not allow their child to be born alive and to be baptized, yet they should completely and undoubtedly hold and firmly believe, that it was included in the promise which God made not only to believing parents, but also to their seed and children, when he said to Abraham, “I will be your God and [the God] of your seed after you (Ge 17:7).” Therefore, in such a case the children are commended to the Almighty through the prayer of their parents and other Christians, so that they certainly and undoubtedly are received into eternal, heavenly bliss. For this reason the parents should become confident, not with an uncertain hope, but with firm, steadfast, and unwavering faith.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen XVI, Baden-Württemberg II*, 623; Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen XVII, Baden-Württemberg III*, 174n; Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen, VI/1, Niedersachsen*, 1013.

<sup>238</sup> Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen IX, Hesse II*, 262n; Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen XI, Bayern I*, 392; Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen XIII, Bayern III*, 555-557.

<sup>239</sup> Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen IX, Hesse II*, 377; Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen X, Hesse III*, 289.

<sup>240</sup> Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen XVI, Baden-Württemberg II*, 629.

<sup>241</sup> Sehling, *Kirchenordnungen XIII, Bayern III*, 189.

### *Early Lutherans in America*

As we turn to look at early confessional Lutherans in America, we notice much of the same teaching, though with some notable differences as well. Of all confessional Lutherans in America during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Porterfield Krauth perhaps wrote more than anyone. In his most well-known writing, *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology*, Krauth spends several pages on this issue in connection with the teaching of the Augsburg Confession that baptism is necessary for salvation. He refutes the notion that the Lutheran church has ever taught baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation, with no exceptions. Instead, he refers to Luther, Bugenhagen and other Lutherans on this issue, concluding: “It would be very easy to give evidence on the same point from all our most eminent Lutheran writers on the doctrine of our Church, but it is not necessary. No one who has read them will need any citations to establish a fact with which he is so familiar.”<sup>242</sup>

At the same time it should be noted that Krauth also seems to venture onto dangerous territory in asserting what would be contrary to Scripture, i.e., that original sin by itself would not merit condemnation. Krauth says:

It is not the doctrine of our Confession that any human creature has ever been, or ever will be, lost purely on account of original sin. For while it supposes that original sin, if *unarrested*, would bring death, it supposes it to be arrested, certainly and ordinarily, by the Holy Spirit, through the divine means rightly received, and throws no obstacle in the way of our hearty faith that, in the case of infants dying without the means, the Holy Ghost, in His own blessed way, directly and extraordinarily, may make the change that delivers the child from the power of indwelling sin.<sup>243</sup>

Among Lutherans of the early Synodical Conference, I was not able to find much direct discussion of this issue. Adolf Hoenecke only mentions in passing that this question “belongs in the field of casuistry.”<sup>244</sup> Francis Pieper does state that baptism is necessary for salvation, but not absolutely necessary.<sup>245</sup> Yet it is interesting to note that Pieper, who clearly was familiar with the

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<sup>242</sup> Krauth, *Conservative Reformation*, 434.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>244</sup> Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume IV*, 98.

<sup>245</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, Volume III*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 280-281.

old Lutheran dogmaticians, did not bring up the teachings of past Lutherans on this question. He simply states:

Are children of Christians who die without Baptism saved? There is some basis for the hope that God has a method, not revealed to us, by which He works faith in the children of Christians dying without Baptism, as certainly He did in the case of girls in the Old Testament (Mk 10:13-16). For children of unbelievers we do not venture to hold out such a hope. We are here entering the field of the unsearchable judgments of God (Ro 11:33).<sup>246</sup>

C.F.W. Walther also does not deal with this question extensively, but he does address it indirectly in several places. A look into his *Pastoral Theology* reveals that Walther recommended an honorable burial for unbaptized infants of believers. In this connection he cites a church order of Electoral Saxony from 1580, which concurs with Chemnitz and other Lutherans as we have discussed above.<sup>247</sup>

Walther's view can also be seen indirectly through Johann Wilhelm Baier's *Compendium*, which he edited for use in the classroom and which had a lasting influence on confessional Lutheran pastors of that era. Baier states: "Meanwhile, we believe that the infants of believing parents who perhaps are deprived of baptism are regenerated and saved by the extraordinary grace of God; but we commit the unbaptized infants of unbelievers to the divine judgment, and indeed we do not dare to forcefully wrest them away from their unwilling parents and baptize them in this manner."<sup>248</sup> Walther supports this statement with quotations from Gerhard and Luther, among others.<sup>249</sup>

A further indicator of the approach to this question in late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century Synodical Conference history can be found in an agenda published by the Wisconsin Synod for pastors from 1911. This agenda includes a burial rite for an unbaptized child which offers comfort in the fact that God can save without baptism and that God has certainly received this child through the prayers of parents and the church.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>247</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (St. Louis, 1872), 307.

<sup>248</sup> Johann Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, ed. (St. Louis: 1879), 465-466.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 466-470.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Appendix E.

### *Present Day Lutheranism*

In more recent years one finds more variety among the voices of confessional Lutheranism than has been the case in the previous history of the Lutheran church. Some Lutherans state that this is a question which should be left to God's hidden will, since God says nothing about this in Scripture. As Roland Hoenecke states, "Scriptures are totally silent on this question. In consequence, the church is in no position to offer a definitive answer. What the church or any individual holds or teaches on this point must be considered a human opinion. In issues of this kind, the child of God does well to leave matters where they belong—in the hands of the all-wise and loving God."<sup>251</sup>

No Lutheran who takes this view would outright condemn any unbaptized infants definitively, but for the children of believers they rather hold out hope for God's mercy on the children of believers. As Gaylin Schmeling says, "However, we sincerely hope that the Lord has a means of saving such infants. Let us trust that God in his mercy has a way, which may not be revealed to us, to work saving faith in babies who, through no fault of their parents, died without baptism."<sup>252</sup> Looking at all of Scripture John Brug concludes "we can in no way minimize the seriousness of depriving an unborn child of its opportunity to be baptized through parental neglect or abortion. The only hope we can hold out in such cases is the mercy of God and the hope that although God has limited us to Baptism as a means of working faith in children, he has not limited himself."<sup>253</sup>

Norbert Mueller and George Krauss give pastors this advice in offering comfort to grieving parents: "As a servant of the Word, he cannot say in the name of the Lord anything that the Lord has not revealed; he cannot speak of the unbaptized child as though he or she had in fact been baptized. Yet, it is not the lack of but the disdain of Baptism that results in condemnation."<sup>254</sup> John Schuetze emphasizes that since God has not provided a means of grace for the unborn, and since "the way the Word works on the unborn raises more questions than it

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<sup>251</sup> Roland Hoenecke, *In Our Image: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (New Ulm, MN: Martin Luther College Printshop, 1995), 356.

<sup>252</sup> Gaylin Schmeling, *Baptism: My Adoption into God's Family* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 84.

<sup>253</sup> John F. Brug, *Your Questions, Scripture's Answers* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2013), 113.

<sup>254</sup> George Krauss and Norbert Mueller, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 87.

answers,”<sup>255</sup> pastors would do well to remain silent where Scripture does. But pastors can also follow Luther in pointing grieving parents to a gracious God and the prayers in his name which God certainly hears.<sup>256</sup>

Other contemporary Lutherans base their discussion of this question on the power of the word to work supernaturally even on the unborn. In this vein they will point especially to the case of John the Baptist in his mother’s womb (Lk 1:39-45). Even with this approach, however, Lutherans speak with varying degrees of certainty. Albert Garcia says,

Parents who partake of the means of grace are parents living in accord with the imperative of the Lord [i.e., Mk 10:14]...In the same way that the Lord filled John the Baptist through the preaching of the Word with the Holy Ghost, God could have worked through His Word the act of faith in the baby. Parents who have been living within the context of the means of grace have, like the Old Testament faithful, lived a life of faith conditioned by the promise of God. Parents should not speculate but be glad that they have lived a life in the light of God’s Word.<sup>257</sup>

This was also the approach taken by one pastor in an interview: to emphasize for parents the importance of surrounding an unborn child with the means of grace, and pointing parents to this as hope in times of pregnancy loss, though stopping short of stating with absolute certainty that their child was saved.

Some Lutherans, however, approach this question in a similar way but also conclude much more firmly that unborn children in the presence of the word are saved. David Scaer says:

This principle of the Word preceding Baptism is set forth explicitly by Luther: “Even those who have come to faith before they were baptized and those who came to faith in Baptism came to their faith through the external Word which preceded.”...The case of John the Baptist believing while still in his mother’s womb is listed as an example of this principle (SA III.viii.7, 12, 13). Luther does not hesitate to use the case of John the Baptist often; thus, dismissing this example as an exceptional case is without warrant. John believes upon hearing the voice of Mary, and thus his faith was created by an external Word of God before he was born (SA III.viii.7-12).<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Schuetze, “Pastoral Theology Brief,” 117.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Albert Garcia, “Original Sin and The Unborn.” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 1983): 150.

<sup>258</sup> David Scaer, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume XI: Baptism* (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 1999), 155.

Scaer later writes against the Reformed notion of salvation by birthright, stating that “the children of confessing Christians have an advantage, not through inheritance of birth, but because of contact with the Word. . . Such children come under the influence of the Word through their parents, and have been offered to God by the prayers of the congregation. Even before birth, such children hear the Gospel and believe.”<sup>259</sup>

Then there are modern Lutherans who argue along the same lines as many of the old Lutherans, pointing believers to the promises of God regarding their children and the promises of God regarding prayer. R.C.H. Lenski preached a sermon for an unbaptized child based on Matthew 18:14 and emphasized God’s gracious will for these children as he concluded:

So this little one rests in the Father’s hands. He gave it life and being; its soul is precious in his sight; he redeemed it through the blood of his Son. God’s will was to save this little babe. While we do not know from his Word the manner in which he carries out his will in instances of this kind, we do know that will itself, and we confidently trust its heavenly ability to bring its saving purpose to pass.<sup>260</sup>

In addition, WELS theologian J.P. Meyer writes in his *Studies in the Augsburg Confession*:

God did not tie his own hands. When Christian parents in due time arrange for the baptism of their child (not only preparing a banquet, but above all meditating on the Word of God and offering their child to God in prayer), then, if the child should be suddenly taken away from them by unexpected death, they can comfort themselves with the truth that God, into whose hands they laid their child, certainly guarded and kept that child in faith unto salvation—even without Baptism.<sup>261</sup>

The views of the LCMS theologians Jack Kilcrease and Karl Hess in this regard have been shown above. Permit several additional comments from the latter as he discusses the current state of this question among Lutherans:

There is little doubt that Bugenhagen would see the uncertainty present among American Lutherans regarding the salvation of infants still in the womb in the same stark terms he saw the Roman opinion that all unbaptized infants would be damned—as a failure or

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>260</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, “God’s Will for Our Little Ones,” in *Funeral Sermons by Lutheran Divines*, ed. L.H. Schuh (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1918), 7.

<sup>261</sup> J.P. Meyer, *Studies in the Augsburg Confession* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), 128-129.

betrayal of the preaching office, which is entrusted with handing out all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are in Christ.<sup>262</sup>

In his conclusion Hess states:

As a priest, the lowliest Christian can be certain that when he carries his unborn infant to Christ in prayer, the baby is saved as assuredly as if the child had been carried to the baptismal font. Thus Bugenhagen's book provides a comfort for grieving Christian parents that deserves wider exposure among pastors, whose calling requires them to comfort such parents.<sup>263</sup>

One final resource of note is the translation of Johann Georg Walch's *The Faith of Unborn Children* by Lutherans for Life.<sup>264</sup> Walch was a professor in Germany during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is most famous for his edition of Luther's works that later became known as the St. Louis edition. Though written in the disputation style that was in vogue at that time, Walch addresses this question in a way similar to Gerhard and other confessional Lutherans of old.

This historical survey has been undertaken to provide a glimpse of the history of the Lutheran church's response to the question of the salvation of unbaptized infants. Even with the perspectives noted above, one will often find a mixture of views about this question, especially, it seems, among more recent Lutherans. Lutherans who reserve judgment on this question still point with hope to the power of prayer<sup>265</sup> or the possibility of the word working on the unborn.<sup>266</sup> Lutherans who prefer to point to God's promises about the unborn children of believers and the power of their prayers do not completely rule out the possibility of God working through the word heard in the womb.<sup>267</sup> On the basis of God's word Lutheran pastors will want to wrestle with this question, which is so important and practical for their ministries and lives as Christians. As they strive to minister in times of pregnancy loss to the best of their ability, they can be guided and enriched by the thoughtful input of their fellow Lutherans, past and present.

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<sup>262</sup> Hess, "The Faith of Unbaptized Infants, 37.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>264</sup> Johann Georg Walch, *The Faith of Unborn Children* (Nevada, IA: Lutherans for Life, 2005).

<sup>265</sup> Schuetze, "Pastoral Theology Brief," 117-118.

<sup>266</sup> Schmeling, *Baptism*, 84; Brug, *Your Questions, Scripture's Answers*, 113.

<sup>267</sup> Hess, "The Faith of Unbaptized Infants," 32.



***Appendix B: Martin Luther's Comfort For Women Who Have Had A Miscarriage***<sup>268</sup>

COMFORT FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE HAD A MISCARRIAGE

By Dr. Martin Luther, 1542

WA 43 (247-250)

Translated by James Raun

INTRODUCTION

As preacher in the town church of Wittenberg, professor at the university, and an active church administrator, John Bugenhagen was a close associate of Luther in the Reformation. He served on the committee for Luther's Bible translation, officiated at Luther's wedding, and preached the sermon at Luther's funeral.

In 1541 Bugenhagen had written an interpretation of Psalm 29 and dedicated it to King Christian III of Denmark, where he had introduced the Reformation in 1537. Before sending the manuscript to the printer, Bugenhagen showed it to Luther. Luther's eye caught a reference to "little children" in the text, whereupon he suggested that Bugenhagen ought to add a word of comfort for women whose children had died at birth or had been born dead and could not be baptized. Bugenhagen, however, was not disposed to add such an appendix, though he did not disagree with Luther in principle. He had written what he felt God gave him to say and did not think it proper to go into this subject himself. However, he said he was willing to add any statement Luther might care to make on the subject. Luther agreed to prepare such a statement. Thus this brief but significant piece is an appendix that has outlived the book to which it had originally been attached.

This short item is a significant statement by Luther regarding the fate of children who die before they can be baptized—a borderline theological question of considerable anguish to grieving mothers. It is just such a person that Luther has in mind, not the sophomoric, speculative thinker.

Writing with pastoral concern, Luther points out that the miscarriage (where it is not due to deliberate carelessness) is not a sign of God's anger. God's judgment is and must remain hidden from us. Luther sees the basis for Christian consolation in the unspoken prayers of the mother in which the Spirit is at work and which sanctify the child, and in the prayers of the Christian congregation.

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<sup>268</sup> This resource is available online from the LCMS website, <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=860>.

This item appeared in three editions of Bugenhagen's exposition of Psalm 29, published in 1542, in five subsequent editions, and in a Latin edition. It was then incorporated in the various editions of Luther's collected works. This translation is based on the German text, *Ein Trost den Weibern, welchen es ungerade gegangen ist mit Kindergebären*, in WA 53, (202) 205-208.2.

#### COMFORT FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE HAD A MISCARRIAGE

A final word<sup>1</sup>—it often happens that devout parents, particularly the wives, have sought consolation from us because they have suffered such agony and heartbreak in child-bearing when, despite their best intentions and against their will, there was a premature birth or miscarriage and their child died at birth or was born dead.

One ought not to frighten or sadden such mothers by harsh words because it was not due to their carelessness or neglect that the birth of the child went off badly. One must make a distinction between them and those females who resent being pregnant, deliberately neglect their child, or go so far as to strangle or destroy it. This is how one ought to comfort them.

First, inasmuch as one cannot and ought not know the hidden judgment of God in such a case—why, after every possible care had been taken, God did not allow the child to be born alive and be baptized—these mothers should calm themselves and have faith that God's will is always better than ours, though it may seem otherwise to us from our human point of view. They should be confident that God is not angry with them or with others who are involved. Rather is this a test to develop patience. We well know that these cases have never been rare since the beginning and that Scripture also cites them as examples, as in Psalm 58 [:8], and St. Paul calls himself an *abortivum*, a misbirth or one untimely born.<sup>2</sup>

Second, because the mother is a believing Christian it is to be hoped that her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer. It is true that a Christian in deepest despair does not dare to name, wish, or hope for the help (as it seems to him) which he would wholeheartedly and gladly purchase with his own life were that possible, and in doing so thus find comfort. However, the words of Paul, Romans 8 [:26-27], properly apply here: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought (that is, as was said above, we dare not express our wishes), rather the Spirit himself intercedes for us mightily with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the heart

knows what is the mind of the Spirit,” etc. Also Ephesians 3 [:20], “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.”

One should not despise a Christian person as if he were a Turk, a pagan, or a godless person. He is precious in God’s sight and his prayer is powerful and great, for he has been sanctified by Christ’s blood and anointed with the Spirit of God. Whatever he sincerely prays for, especially in the unexpressed yearning of his heart, becomes a great, unbearable cry in God’s ears, God must listen, as he did to Moses, Exodus 14 [:15], “Why do you cry to me?” even though Moses couldn’t whisper, so great was his anxiety and trembling in the terrible troubles that beset him. His sighs and the deep cry of his heart divided the Red Sea and dried it up, led the children of Israel across, and drowned Pharaoh with all his army,<sup>3</sup> etc. This and even more can be accomplished by a true, spiritual longing. Even Moses did not know how or for what he should pray—not knowing how the deliverance would be accomplished—but his cry came from his heart.

Isaiah did the same against King Sennacherib<sup>4</sup> and so did many other kings and prophets who accomplished inconceivable and impossible things by prayer, to their astonishment afterward. But before that they would not have dared to expect or wish so much of God. This means to receive things far higher and greater than we can understand or pray for, as St. Paul says, Ephesians 3 [:20], etc. Again, St. Augustine declared that his mother was praying, sighing, and weeping for him, but did not desire anything more than that he might be converted from the errors of the Manicheans<sup>5</sup> and become a Christian.<sup>6</sup> Thereupon God gave her not only what she desired but, as St. Augustine puts it, her “chiefest desire” (*cardinem desiderii eius*) that is, what she longed for with unutterable sighs—that Augustine become not only a Christian but also a teacher above all others in Christendom.<sup>7</sup> Next to the apostles Christendom has none that is his equal.

Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcised on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents in view of the promise that God willed to be their God. God (they say) has not limited his power to the sacraments, but has made a covenant with us through his word.<sup>8</sup> Therefore we ought to speak differently and in a more consoling way with Christians than with pagans or wicked people (the two are the same), even in such cases where we do not know God’s hidden judgment. For he says and is not lying, “All things are possible to him who believes” [Mark 9:23], even though they have not prayed, or

expected, or hoped for what they would have wanted to see happen. Enough has been said about this. Therefore one must leave such situations to God and take comfort in the thought that he surely has heard our unspoken yearning and done all things better than we could have asked.

In summary, see to it that above all else you are a true Christian and that you teach a heartfelt yearning and praying to God in true faith, be it in this or any other trouble. Then do not be dismayed or grieved about your child or yourself, and know that your prayer is pleasing to God and that God will do everything much better than you can comprehend or desire. “Call upon me,” he says in Psalm 50 [:15] “in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” For this reason one ought not straightway condemn such infants for whom and concerning whom believers and Christians have devoted their longing and yearning and praying. Nor ought one to consider them the same as others for whom on faith, prayer, or yearning are expressed on the part of Christians and believers. God intends that his promise and our prayer or yearning which is grounded in that promise should not be disdained or rejected, but be highly valued and esteemed. I have said it before and preached it often enough: God accomplishes much through the faith and longing of another, even a stranger, even though there is still no personal faith. But this is given through the channel of another’s intercessions, as in the gospel Christ raised the widow’s son at Nain because of the prayers of his mother apart from the faith of the son.<sup>9</sup> And he freed the little daughter of the Canaanite woman from the demon through the faith of the mother apart from the daughter’s faith.<sup>10</sup> The same was true of the king’s son, John 4 [:46-53] and of the paralytic and many others of whom we need not say anything here.

#### NOTES

1. Luther wrote this item to be appended to Bugenhagen’s exposition of Psalm 29.
2. Cf. I Cor. 15:8.
3. Exod. 14:26-28.
4. Cf. Isa. 37:4.
5. As a young man Augustine (354-430) adhered to the philosophy of the Persian teacher Manes (ca. 215-275), which was based on a dualism of light and darkness.
6. Confessions, 5, 8; cf. F. J. Sheed (trans.), *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), p. 931.

7. Augustine subsequently became bishop of Hippo. His thinking has played a significant role in Christian theology and had considerable influence upon Luther, who frequently quoted from his writings.

8. At this point the edition of Luther's works by Enders (vol. XV, pp. 55-56) includes some addition material as cited in WA 53, 207, n. 1: "that he could without them [and sacrament and in ways unknown to us save the unbaptized infants as he did for many in the time of the law of Moses (even kings) apart from the law, such as, Job, Naaman, the king of Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, etc. However, he did not want the law to be openly despised, but upheld under threat of the punishment of an eternal curse.

"So I consider and hope that the good and merciful God is well-intentioned toward these infants who do not receive baptism through no fault of their own or in disregard of his manifest command of baptism.

"Yet [I consider] that he does not and did not wish this to be publicly preached or believed because of the iniquity of the world, so that what he had ordained and commanded would not be despised. For we see that he has commanded much because of the iniquity of the world, but does not constrain the godly in the same way.

"In summary, the Spirit turns everything for those who fear him to the best, but to the obstinate he is obstinate" [Ps. 18:27].

9. Cf. Luke 7:11-17.

10. Cf. Matt. 15:22-28.

### *Appendix C: Survey Questions*

This survey was sent out via e-mail to ten WELS pastors at larger congregations in the Milwaukee area. The rationale behind this was the hope that pastors at larger congregations would have had more experience ministering in pregnancy loss situations. Six of the ten pastors responded to this survey, and with one survey I was able to conduct an informal follow up interview.

***The senior thesis topic that I have chosen to research examines how a pastor can equip himself to comfort and counsel believers who have had a miscarriage or stillbirth. As part of my research I am asking you to answer the following questions in order to provide pastoral insights for the various issues surrounding miscarriage and stillbirth. I appreciate your time and effort and I am grateful for your input.***

1. How long have you been in the pastoral ministry?
2. Over the course of your ministry so far, how often have you had the opportunity to counsel Christians who have been affected by miscarriage or stillbirth?
3. How do you think the world, in general, views and handles miscarriage and stillbirth? Does the way the world thinks about miscarriage and stillbirth have an impact on believers as they grieve the loss of their child?
4. What do you consider to be the challenges that face pastors as they minister to believers who have had a miscarriage or stillbirth? What spiritual and emotional obstacles might pastors encounter?
5. What steps do you take in counseling believers who have lost a child through miscarriage or stillbirth?
6. How would you respond if grieving parents who lost their child through miscarriage or stillbirth asked you if their child is in heaven? What comfort from Scripture would you offer them?
7. Do you know of any differences among Lutherans with regard to how they offer comfort for miscarriage or stillbirth? If so, what are those differences?
8. What practical suggestions would you give to pastors who are ministering to believers affected by miscarriage or stillbirth?
9. What rites or rituals, if any, do you consider to be helpful to believers who are grieving for their child?

## *Appendix D: What to Say and What Not to Say at a Pregnancy Loss*

The following list was taken directly from the blog of Donielle Baker.<sup>269</sup> Baker has gone through pregnancy loss herself and reflects here on a number of ways people can avoid the awkwardness and pain of not knowing what to say or how to act around those who have lost a child.

You Shouldn't:

- ***You shouldn't ask: "were you trying?"*** It's just completely irrelevant, and parents fall in love with their babies whether they've been trying for a long time or when they are 'planned'.
- ***You shouldn't: avoid them or pretend like it never happened.*** Yes, the couple may still be grieving and it may be awkward, but please don't ignore them. Saying nothing about their loss makes them feel more invisible or like the baby didn't matter.
- ***You shouldn't say: "It's for the best/It's better this way."*** Would you say this to someone who lost a parent or spouse to cancer? What about someone who lost a friend or relative in a car accident? Did those people die because it is somehow better that they did? The loss of this little baby is the loss of a person, and no grieving parent wants to hear that their child died because it's better this way.
- ***You shouldn't say: "there was probably something wrong with the baby."*** Because no matter the disease, disorder, or handicap, the parent still misses their dear child. They would gladly welcome a special needs baby to their family.
- ***You shouldn't say: "better luck next time."*** This was actually mentioned a couple of times, so I thought I'd better include it. Though it seems so rude. I guess there are some pretty unsympathetic people out there.
- ***You shouldn't say: "there will be more chances in the future." or "you're young you will have more."*** No one has a "crystal ball", no one knows the will of God. While you feel that this may help a hurting heart, it in fact minimizes their grief, and may not necessarily be true.

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<sup>269</sup> <http://www.naturalfertilityandwellness.com/what-you-should-and-shouldnt-say-to-someone-who-has-lost-a-baby/> Accessed December 3, 2014.

- ***You shouldn't say: "at least you have other kids."*** Yes, to a couple that has other children, their sweet little ones here may be of some comfort. But they still miss THIS child and had dreams for THIS child.
- ***You shouldn't say: "God wanted it this way." or "It is God's will."*** This may be so. And it may be that we live in a fallen world where death and disease are part of it. But words said to minimize grief tend to make the mourning parent feel like they shouldn't be sad. They may know that this was in God's will, but they are still allowed to grieve.
- ***You shouldn't: tell them you understand when you don't.*** Even if you have experienced the loss of a baby, all of our stories are different: This couple may have struggled to get pregnant, this may not be their first loss. It may be her first child, or it may be her fourth (*the grief will hit just as deeply, but the emotions and the reactions may be different*). She may be waiting to miscarry yet, or she may not have found out until the miscarriage started. She may have had to experience a procedure called a D&C to remove the baby, or she may have had to deliver her baby at home, all alone in the bathroom. She may have to cancel orders for, or put away the maternity clothes. She may have to put away baby things. And all of us experience grief differently. Some women have to deal with anger, others extreme sadness. Many experience some type of depression or anxiety and whether or not you've experienced a loss, **you just can't understand how she feels.**
- ***You shouldn't: call the baby "it".*** One of the hardest things for a grieving mother to deal with is the fact that most of the medical community (*especially for a loss in the first half of the pregnancy*) medicalize what's happening. The baby is only referred to as "tissue", and they are almost afraid to humanize this little being, like somehow this will help a woman/couple get over their grief.
- ***You shouldn't say: "it was just not meant to be."*** Again, would you say this had they lost another family member? It's just not helpful and can hurt.
- ***You shouldn't: try to force them to "get over it" too quickly, before they are ready or when their grieving style is different than yours.*** We all go through the stages of grief differently, some quicker than others. The grief also comes in waves, one day they may be fine, the next may be quite difficult. Seemingly little things can bring back floods of emotion.



- ***You shouldn't say:*** “**you are getting up there in age and your eggs aren't as perfect as they once were.**” Most women start to blame themselves, that their body somehow did this. It's hard enough for a grieving mother to come to terms with the loss when she feels like she is somehow responsible.
- ***You shouldn't say:*** “**Be glad that he/she is in such a better place now.**” Yes, this is true. But any parent who has lost a child can tell you that they would like to hold their child *now*. To enjoy them *now*, and watch them grow up, *now*. They know where their baby is, but it's so hard to be glad about it.
- ***You shouldn't:*** **get mad at them or take it personally if they don't call you immediately to tell you (even if you are a family member).** Every person shares the news in the way that is most therapeutic for them, and sometimes having to speak over the phone about the loss of a baby when the grief is so fresh is extremely difficult.
- ***You shouldn't say:*** “**At least you weren't that far along.**” Would you say that it was better for someone to die at age 23 instead of 67? No matter how far along she was, the couple is still dealing with the loss of a baby and already fell in love with this little person. They most likely had already been planning out the logistics of bringing a new baby into the family. This was their baby, no matter how small.
- ***You shouldn't ask:*** “**what did you do wrong?**” or “**what was the problem?**” Again, she may already be dealing with the issue of blaming herself for something she did, and asking this can cause a great amount of guilt. Most miscarriages, unless you've had multiple, are not usually ‘diagnosed’ and there is no testing done. So they may never know why their little one passed away. A still birth or known ectopic pregnancy may have an answer or it may not – and the family will share what they would like to share of the “cause”. If they do share a cause, let's not mention the “well it's better this way then”.
- ***You shouldn't forget:*** **it takes time to heal, physically & emotionally.** Sometimes the physical process of miscarriage is much overlooked. Even the medical community considers it like a heavy period. But on top of the bleeding (which sometimes can be so heavy it leaves the woman anemic for months) she also has to deal with the major hormone upheaval that happens after a pregnancy. She may need many weeks or even months to heal and spend time out of public eye.

- ***You shouldn't: bring your new baby to “cheer them up”.*** Children should always be left at home when visiting a grieving family, especially infant babies when they've lost a baby themselves.
- ***You shouldn't: imply that her loss isn't that bad or compare her situation to someone else's loss.*** Just because someone else has lost more babies, or were further along, or lost multiples, doesn't mean that this couple shouldn't grieve as deeply.
- ***You shouldn't: take it personally if she seems to avoid you or defriends you (or hides you) on facebook, especially if you are pregnant yourself.*** Losing a baby is difficult, and seeing a pregnant relative or friend's belly grow each week can often be a painful reminder. So please give them space if that is what they need. Don't forget about them, just know that some women need extra space.
- ***You shouldn't ask: “if/when they'll have another child” or “ask if/when someone else will have another child”.*** First off, to put it bluntly, it's none of your business. This couple may have dealt with infertility and have no idea when they'll be able to conceive again, or afford more treatments. They may be dealing with physical issues due to the miscarriage that will prevent them from having another baby for some time. They may need more time to grieve or may be worried about a future pregnancy. And to the second comment, again, it's just none of your business, or theirs, to know what any couple is doing to grow their family.
- ***You shouldn't: surprise them around a group of people with news of your own pregnancy.*** Yes, your pregnancy should be received with joy, but many times it's difficult for a couple (*especially the woman*) to be surprised by your news. Especially when it involves a group of people or public place. Don't get me wrong – she will be happy for you, but many times she will also need to grieve the loss of her baby and the loss of her dream first. Telling her privately beforehand is a nice gesture.
- ***You shouldn't ask: Is there anything I can do?*** A grieving family can rarely come up with something you can do to help. So when you ask, also ask specifics. (*“Can I help clean, bring a meal, get groceries, etc*)
- ***You shouldn't: pressure them or tell them what to do regarding miscarriage inducing drugs or d&c.*** If you've been through a miscarriage or loss of a baby, share your experiences, but let them make their own decisions. Some women were grateful to have the

option of a D&C, others preferred to miscarry at home. Many couples have to deal with ectopic pregnancies and are probably having to deal with making some very tough decisions, so even if you made a different decision when you walked that road, just be there for them. Same for a couple that is preparing for a baby born still.

You Should:

- ***You should say: “I am so sorry for your loss”***
- ***You should: bring them a meal.*** The physical process of a miscarriage is much like the birth of a baby. She’ll go through contractions, many times it’s painful. And even if the process has to be helped along medically, there are still major physical things going on in her body. The birth of a still born baby brings all of the risks to the mother that any birth brings and then some. The grief from any loss can be overwhelming for at least the first few weeks. People bring food after the birth of a baby, and people bring food after the loss of a family member. This is both, ask when you can bring them a meal.
- ***You should: give them a hug and let them know you care and are thinking about them.***
- ***You should: Send them a card.*** Many times these are the only physical things that they can hold that are proof their baby existed. I can’t begin to tell you how precious those cards are that I received.
- ***You should: offer physical help.*** Taking out the garbage, washing dishes, mopping floors, take their dog for a walk, pick up groceries – these are the things they may be unable to do or to keep up on for the first few weeks. My sister came and washed my dishes after they’d piled up for over a week and it was a wonderful expression of her love.*(and if they have other small children, you could offer to babysit – though they may want their children close by – or play with them outside)*
- ***You should say: “I don’t know what to say, but I’m so sorry.”***
- ***You should: share your own story of loss, gently, and without minimizing their pain.*** Women who have been there before can often times minister in such a special way.
- ***You should: be gentle in your speaking.***
- ***You should: be a shoulder to cry on.*** In dealing with grief, people may cry. And while it can sometimes feel awkward talking to a crying person, know that they need to cry at that very moment. No words are needed.

- ***You should: pray for them.*** Let them know you are praying, ask them what their specific prayer requests are, pray *with* them.
- ***You should: encourage them to rest and take time to heal both physically and emotionally.***
- ***You should: acknowledge there was a baby.*** Call the baby a baby, talk about the baby, mention their baby by name if they decided to name him/her.
- ***You should: listen when she needs to talk, reserving all judgment.***
- ***You should: remember this child.*** Write down the date of the loss or the due date and send a note letting them know you're thinking about them. These dates, along with major holidays in that first year or two bring a lot of different emotions to surface. Mother's remember their babies due dates, and not a year goes by that most don't take notice. The first few years are especially painful.

## *Appendix E: Rites and Prayers from Lutheran Sources*

### **1. 16<sup>th</sup> Century Prayer for God's Blessing on Mother and Child<sup>270</sup>**

We thank you, Lord God, heavenly Father, that you have blessed this woman with the fruit of the womb, and we ask your boundless mercy that you, as a faithful Father, would allow her to be entrusted to yourself and that you would graciously deliver her from her motherly pains. After her pain, give her the joy which your dear Son has given as comfort and assurance. Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we also bear to you in our poor arms this unborn little child at your word, when you say: "Let the little children come to me," and we ask from the heart: let it be yours. Let it happen, then, that you would give this child into our hands, as we completely hope in you and as you certainly provide for us. Then we will also bring it to you physically in holy baptism, according to the command of you who are the eternal Savior of all people, praised with your Father and the Holy Spirit, true God in eternity. Amen.

### **2. Wisconsin Synod Burial Rite for an Unborn Child from 1896<sup>271</sup>**

Beloved in the Lord, Christ says in John 3: "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." From this it is clear that no one obtains salvation without holy baptism. Yet we must understand this concerning those people who can have baptism, and not concerning those who could not be participants in it. Such may rightly be commended to the mercy of God.

But you also have another specific reason to comfort yourselves that God has received this little child into grace for Christ's sake. For it has been brought before God through general prayer in the Christian church, and we know that such prayer in the name of Jesus Christ is answered according to his own friendly and comforting promise.

Thus we correctly conclude that also the children of Christians, who must lack the contempt of baptism without the sacrament, are likewise in God's grace and heirs of eternal life. They are also properly given a Christian burial and lowered into the earth as grains of wheat for the eternal harvest. And their Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who sanctified them in their mother's

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<sup>270</sup> "Von der Seeligkeit der ungetauften Kindlein / welche etwa in Mutterleibe / oder so plötzlich und / ohn unser Versäumnueß eilend hinweg sterben / dass man sie nich zuvor täuffen kan," cited in Dedeken, *Thesauri Consiliorum et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 437.

<sup>271</sup> Evang.-Luth. Synode von Wisconsin u.a. Staaten, *Agende* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1896), 380-381.

womb with his incarnation, will also raise them up on the Last Day with glorified bodies and bring them to look upon and enjoy his glory.

In this way parents want to take comfort in their sadness and be content with God's will. But may the Lord God help them and all of us to blessedly follow in keeping with his time, for the sake of his dear Son Jesus Christ, in whose name we faithfully pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

### 3. WELS Burial Rite and Prayers from *Christian Worship: Pastor's Companion*<sup>272</sup>

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## BURIAL OF INFANTS OR THE STILLBORN

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*This service is intended for use for the burial of a baptized infant when Christian Funeral I or II is not used or for an unbaptized infant of Christian parents.*

*After the bereaved have gathered, the minister says:*

**M** The grace of our Lord ☩ Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

**C** And also with you.

### PSALM

*The minister reads Psalm 23 or another psalm.*

### PSALM 23

The LORD is my shepherd,  
I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his  
name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow  
of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my  
enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

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<sup>272</sup> *Christian Worship: Pastor's Companion* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 145-150, 293-296. One will find the same burial rite in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 93-96.

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Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of  
my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**WORDS OF COMFORT**

**M** When anticipation and joy suddenly turn into disappointment and grief, we turn to God for comfort and reassurance. God does not always explain to us why he allows circumstances that sadden us, but he calls us in faith to acknowledge his perfect wisdom and love. He has given us his one and only Son, Christ Jesus, and through him will always work for good in the lives of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.

*In the case of a baptized child*

In love God has blessed his people by providing the washing of Holy Baptism, through which he gives rebirth, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to us and our children. Relying on God's promises, we are confident that \_\_\_\_\_ is now in the loving arms of God and enjoys the eternal blessings of paradise.

*OR*

*In the case of an unbaptized or stillborn child*

In love God has blessed his people by providing the washing of Holy Baptism, through which he gives rebirth, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to us and our children. When God himself ends the life of a child before Baptism,



we hold to the truth that God has not bound himself to the means of grace he has provided for our faithful use. In faith we look to him who alone is the source of faith, trusting that in his grace he has received \_\_\_\_\_ into his arms, for the sake of his Son, Jesus Christ.

## LESSON

*One or more of the following or other lessons are read.*

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:13-15)

Peter [said], "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children." (Acts 2:38,39)

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, we shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the

## BURIAL OF INFANTS OR THE STILLBORN

mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:42-45,49,54-57)

*A brief sermon may follow.*

## PRAYER

**M** Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, our hopes have been turned to sorrow. You gave, and you have taken away. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than our ways and your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Help us, Father, also in this time of sadness, to trust in you. Strengthen the faith of *these parent(s)* into whose life you have allowed sorrow to come. Teach *them* to depend on your boundless mercy and to trust that *their* little one has been invited into the arms of your Son. Grant that *they*, and all of us, may also come at last into the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C** Amen.

## COMMITTAL

*The minister may lay his hand on the casket.*

**M** It has pleased our heavenly Father in his wise providence to call this child to himself. We now commit *his* body to *the ground/its resting place*—earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust—in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, ☩ who, by the power that enables him to bring

everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

**M** Lord, remember us in your kingdom as we pray:

### LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.

*OR*

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.

BURIAL OF INFANTS OR THE STILLBORN

**M** Almighty God, by the death of your dear Son you overcame death and redeemed and saved little children no less than others. By his rising from death you restored everlasting life, that by the power of his resurrection, our mortal bodies may also be raised from the dead to eternal life. Grant that we may ever confidently believe this and, finally, with all your saints, be partakers of this joyful resurrection, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C** Amen.

BLESSING

**M** The God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, ✝ to whom be glory for ever and ever.

**C** Amen.

through medical technology and those in the medical profession. Grant wholeness and restoration of health as we pray for those who are ill in body or mind, who long for your healing touch. Make the weak strong, the sick healthy, the broken whole, and make those who serve them agents of your love. Then all will be renewed in vigor to point to the risen Christ, who conquered death that we might live eternally.

## *Death of a Child*

### GENERAL

Lord God, Father of mercies and God of all comfort, we thank you for your tender care in this time of trial and sadness. Console and comfort \_\_\_\_\_ with the assurance of your gracious compassion and unfailing love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Lord our God, your ways are often hidden, unsearchable, and beyond our understanding. For reasons we cannot comprehend, you have turned the joyful hopes of *these parent(s)* into sadness. We know, dear Lord, that your ways are loving and wise. But we are often confused and fearful. Help those who now experience sorrow to bow humbly before your will. Comfort them with your life-giving promise that in all things you are working for their good.

Almighty and everlasting God, with Job we declare, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In your merciful love, you gave this child to *his* parent(s). In your infinite wisdom, you have taken *him* from *his* earthly home to *his* eternal home. Although we do not always understand your ways, help us humbly follow you as you lead us through life. Help us put our trust in your unfailing love. Comfort the parent(s) who *have* suffered this grievous loss, and all who mourn with

*them*, with the assurance that through Holy Baptism \_\_\_\_\_ was delivered from sin and is forever safe with you in glory. Lead us all to look forward eagerly to the day when we will be reunited with those who have gone before us and will see you face-to-face in heaven. Hear us, help us, and bless us for Jesus' sake.

O God our Father, your beloved Son took children into his arms and blessed them. Give us grace, we pray, to know that even though \_\_\_\_\_ is no longer with us, *he* is in your unending care and love, and bring us all to your heavenly kingdom; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God our Father, whose Son took children in his arms and blessed them, give your comfort to \_\_\_\_\_, who mourn(s) the loss of *their* beloved child. Give *them* a strong faith and the sure and certain hope of the resurrection when we shall meet in heavenly joy and glory, through Jesus Christ.

O God our Father, your Son took children into his arms and blessed them. Comfort \_\_\_\_\_, who mourn(s) the loss of \_\_\_\_\_, *their* beloved child. Help *them* to look beyond this dark hour of sorrow to the resurrection and the life assured to us by our Savior's victory over death and the grave. Wipe the tears from *their* eyes with the precious promise that all who are baptized into the death of Christ will also live with him. Strengthen and help us, that amid the trials and tribulations of this present life, we keep our eyes fixed firmly on our true home above, where all who are your children by faith in Christ will dwell for ever and ever, in his name we pray.

### **Older Child**

Eternal God, you gave \_\_\_\_\_ a new birth in Baptism and entrusted *him* to us for a time that seems too short. As we thank you for the life we shared, help us now to remember that *he* is with you in heavenly glory. Bring us all to that day when we shall stand in your presence with all your saints in light eternal, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **With Parents**

Almighty Father, your mercies never fail; your goodness does not end. We commit into your loving care this child, \_\_\_\_\_, whom you have taken from us to be with you. Look with compassion on \_\_\_\_\_; encourage *them* as a father encourages his children; comfort *them* as a mother comforts her little ones. Heal *their* wounds, and help *them* find rest in your gracious promises. Console and strengthen *them* with your love. May the words of your Son that speak of his care for little children breathe newfound peace into *their* troubled hearts; in his name we pray.

### **MISCARRIAGE, STILLBORN, DEATH SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH**

O God our Father, your beloved Son took children into his arms and blessed them. Give us grace, we pray, that we may entrust \_\_\_\_\_ to your never-failing care and love, and bring us all to your heavenly kingdom; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, by the death of your dear Son you overcame death and redeemed and saved little children no less than others. By his rising from death you restored everlasting life, that by the power of his resurrection, our mortal bodies may also be raised from the dead to eternal life. Grant that we may ever confidently believe this and, finally, with all your saints, be partakers of this joyful resurrection, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### **For the Mother**

Lord, you understand all things. You know our hearts. Many times we are baffled by life's experiences and fail to comprehend your ways. Help us to overcome our doubts, and give us courage to go on. O great Comforter, grant peace to \_\_\_\_\_, through your gracious Word.

Support her with your loving care. Give her strength of body and mind, that she may fulfill your divine purposes in her life; in the name of Christ our Savior.

**For the Parent(s)**

Almighty and eternal God, our hopes have been turned to sorrow. You gave, and you have taken away. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than our ways and your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Help us, Father, also in this time of sadness, to trust in you. Strengthen the faith of *these* parent(s) into whose life you have allowed sorrow to come. Teach *them* to depend on your boundless mercy and to trust that *their* little one has been invited into the arms of your Son. Grant that *they*, and all of us, may also come at last into the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

*Death of a Adult*

**GENERAL**

O Lord God, Lord of life and death, we thank you for all the mercies with which you blessed our fellow believer \_\_\_\_\_, now fallen asleep. We thank you especially for having brought *him* to the knowledge of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would comfort *his* family and all who mourn *his* death with your precious promises and cheer them with the sure hope of a blessed reunion in heaven. Grant the lifeless body rest and at last, together with us all, a joyful resurrection to life everlasting. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain hearts of wisdom and finally be saved, through Jesus Christ, our risen and ever-living Lord.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we turn to you in this hour of sadness. We thank you for having made our loved one your



#### 4. LCMS Burial Rite from *Lutheran Worship: Agenda*<sup>273</sup>



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## BURIAL OF THE STILLBORN

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1. *This service may be adapted for the burial of an unbaptized child of Christian parents.*

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### AT THE HOME

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2. *The pastor greets the bereaved.*

☞ **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

☞ Amen

3. *The PSALM is read.*

PSALM 23 (KJV)	OR	PSALM 23 (NIV)
<p><sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd;* I shall not want.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;* he leadeth me beside the still waters.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul;* he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;*</p>		<p><sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd,* I shall lack nothing.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures,* he leads me beside quiet waters,</p> <p><sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.* He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,*</p>

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<sup>273</sup> Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship: Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 197-201.

for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff,  
they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before  
me in the presence of mine  
enemies;\*  
thou anointest my head with  
oil; my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy  
shall follow me all the days  
of my life;\*  
and I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord for ever.

Glory be to the Father and  
to the Son\*  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever.  
Amen

for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my  
enemies.\*  
You anoint my head with  
oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and love  
will follow me all the days  
of my life,\*  
and I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever.

Glory be to the Father and  
to the Son\*  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever.  
Amen

4. A *READING* from Holy Scripture is announced, and one of the following portions is read.

**A** Hear the Word of God from the \_\_\_\_\_ chapter of \_\_\_\_\_.

**“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10:27-29)**

**People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:13-15)**

**Peter [said], “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children.” (Acts 2:38-39a)**

**A** This is the Word of the Lord.

5. *The pastor may read the following or speak other suitable words:*

☐ When God in his will for us changes our anticipation and joy into disappointment and grief, we turn to him for comfort and reassurance, which can come only from him. He does not explain to us why he has allowed the circumstance that saddens us, but he does call us through it to a faith which again acknowledges him to be our heavenly Father, who has given us his first and best in Christ Jesus and through him will work always for good in the lives of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

In love God has blessed his people also with the washing of Holy Baptism, through which he gives rebirth in the power of the Holy Spirit to us and to our children. When in his will God allows the sadness of stillbirth [the sudden death of a child before Baptism], we trust that he himself is not bound to the means of grace that he has provided for our conscientious use. So we look in faith and hope to him who alone is the source of our faith and hope, trusting that in his grace he has received this child to himself for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ.

6. *The COLLECT is said.*

☐ Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, our hopes have been turned to sorrow. You gave, and you have taken away. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than our ways and your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Help us, Father, also in this time of sadness, to trust in you. Strengthen the faith of these parents into whose life you have allowed this sorrow to come. Teach them to depend on your boundless mercy and to trust that their little one has been invited into the arms of your Son. Grant that they, and all of us, may also come at last into the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <285>

☒ Amen

7. *The LORD'S PRAYER is said.*

☐ Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.

OR ☐ Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen

8. *The pastor blesses the bereaved.*

**P** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit † be with you all.

**R** Amen

THE COMMITTAL

9. *When the coffin is lowered into the grave or placed in its resting place, the pastor says:*

**P** The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

The holy apostle instructs us about the resurrection of the dead:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:42-44, 54-57)

10. *The pastor continues:*

**P** It has pleased our heavenly Father in his wise providence to call this child to himself. We now commit his/her body to the ground/its resting place; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subdue all things to himself.

**R** Amen

**P** Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

**R** Our Father who art in heaven,  
 hallowed be thy name,  
 thy kingdom come,  
 thy will be done  
 on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread;  
 and forgive us our trespasses  
 as we forgive those  
 who trespass against us;  
 and lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom  
 and the power and the glory  
 forever and ever. Amen

OR **R** Our Father in heaven,  
 hallowed be your name,  
 your kingdom come,  
 your will be done  
 on earth as in heaven.  
 Give us today our daily bread.  
 Forgive us our sins  
 as we forgive those  
 who sin against us.  
 Lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For the kingdom, the power,  
 and the glory are yours  
 now and forever. Amen

**P** Almighty God, by the death of your dear Son you overcame death and redeemed and saved little children no less than others, by your rising from death you restored everlasting life that by the power of your resurrection our mortal bodies may also be raised from the dead to eternal life. Grant that we may ever confidently believe this and finally with all your saints be partakers of this joyful resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <286>

**R** Amen

11. *The pastor blesses the people.*

**P** The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

**R** Amen

12. *The pastor may dismiss the people with these words:*

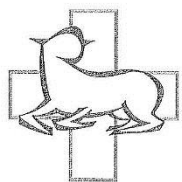
**P** Christ is risen.

**R** He is risen indeed.

**P** Let us go forth in peace

**R** in the name of the Lord.

## 5. LCMS Burial Rite from *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda*<sup>274</sup>



# BURIAL FOR A STILLBORN CHILD OR UNBAPTIZED CHILD

1. This rite is intended for the burial of a stillborn child of Christian parents or a child of Christian parents who died before Baptism could be administered.
2. According to the circumstance, the rite may be conducted either publicly or privately at the church, funeral home, hospital, or the family home. With adaptation, the entire rite may also be held at the graveside.
3. When there is no body present, the Committal is omitted.

**P** In the name of the Father and of the  $\text{†}$  Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C** Amen.

*Matthew 28:19b*

**P** Beloved in the Lord, when God in His will for us allows our anticipation and joy to be changed into disappointment and grief, we turn to Him for comfort. In the midst of our sadness He calls us by the Gospel to a faith that will withstand such times of testing. Though we may not in this life have answers to the questions we ask, by the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ we know that God is our loving Father, our Brother in suffering and death, and the Comforter who even now brings peace to our grief-stricken hearts.

While alive and in the womb, this child was brought and commended to Christ in our prayers. We should not doubt that these prayers have been heard, for we have God's own kind and comforting promises that such prayers in the name of Jesus Christ are heard by Him.

In love God has blessed His people with the washing of Holy Baptism, through which He gives rebirth in the Holy Spirit to us and to our children. When death comes before Baptism, we trust in His mercy that by His grace He has received this child to Himself for the sake of the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We take comfort in the confident hope that this child will be raised to life with Christ in the resurrection on the Last Day. The Lord grant that we remain steadfast in His Word and faith until we all come to the joys of life everlasting; for the sake of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

<sup>274</sup> Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 132-139.

*One or more of the following psalms is prayed.*

**Psalm 139**

For you formed my | inward parts;\*  
 you knitted me together in my | mother's womb.  
 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonder- | fully made.\*  
 Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it | very well.  
 My frame was not hid- | den from you,\*  
 when I was being made in secret, intricately woven  
 in the depths | of the earth.  
 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were  
 written, every | one of them,\*  
 the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were | none of them.  
 How precious to me are your thoughts, | O God!\*

How vast is the | sum of them!  
 If I would count them, they are more | than the sand.\*  
 I awake, and I am still | with you.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
 and to the Holy | Spirit;  
 as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
 is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

*Psalm 139:13-18*

**Psalm 23**

*English Standard Version*

The LORD is my | shepherd;\*  
 I | shall not want.  
 He makes me lie down  
 in green | pastures.\*  
 He leads me beside still | waters.  
 He re- | stores my soul.\*  
 He leads me in paths of  
 righteousness for his | name's sake.  
 Even though I walk through the  
 valley of the shadow of death, I will  
 fear no evil, for you are | with me;\*  
 your rod and your staff,  
 they | comfort me.  
 You prepare a table before me in the  
 presence of my | enemies;\*  
 you anoint my head with oil;  
 my cup | overflows.  
 Surely goodness and mercy shall  
 follow me all the days | of my life,\*  
 and I shall dwell in the house of the  
 LORD for- | ever.

*King James Version*

The LORD is my | shepherd;\*  
 I | shall not want.  
 He maketh me to lie down  
 in green | pastures:\*  
 He leadeth me beside the still | waters.  
 He restoreth | my soul:\*  
 He leadeth me in the paths of  
 righteousness for his | name's sake.  
 Yea, though I walk through the  
 valley of the shadow of death, I will  
 fear no evil: for thou art | with me;\*  
 thy rod and thy staff,  
 they | comfort me.  
 Thou preparest a table before me in the  
 presence of mine | enemies:\*  
 Thou anointest my head with oil;  
 my cup runneth | over.  
 Surely goodness and mercy shall  
 follow me all the days | of my life:\*  
 and I will dwell in the house of the  
 LORD for- | ever.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

**Psalm 130**

Out | of the depths\*

I cry to you, | O LORD!

O Lord, | hear my voice!\*

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for | mercy!

If you, O LORD, should mark in- | iquities,\*

O Lord, | who could stand?

But with you there is for- | giveness,\*

that you | may be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my | soul waits,\*

and in his | word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the | morning,\*

more than watchmen for the | morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is | steadfast love,\*

and with him is plentiful re- | demption.

And he will redeem | Israel\*  
from all his in- | iquities.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

*One or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture are read. The first reading is introduced by the following:*

**P** Hear the Word of God from \_\_\_\_\_, chapter \_\_\_\_\_.

*Additional readings may be introduced by citing the biblical reference. After each reading, the following is said:*

**P** This is the Word of the Lord.

**G** **Thanks be to God.**

**Rachel weeps for her children**

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."

Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping,

and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work,

declares the LORD,



and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.  
There is hope for your future, declares the LORD,  
and your children shall come back to their own country.” *Jeremiah 31:15-17*

**The Lord gives, the Lord takes away**

[Job] said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

*Job 1:21*

**Nothing shall separate us from the love of God**

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Romans 8:31-39*

**We live to the Lord**

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

*Romans 14:7-9*

**He will wipe away all tears**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I

will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

*Revelation 21:1-7*

**Their angels always see the Father’s face**

The disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”

*Matthew 18:1-5, 10-11*

**Let the children come to Me**

They were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

*Mark 10:13-16*

**I will give you rest**

Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

*Matthew 11:25-30*

*The pastor may speak words of consolation to the bereaved.*

*A hymn may be sung.*

**P** Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, Your Son bore all our griefs and carried all our sorrows. Strengthen the faith of these grieving parents and all who bear this heavy burden. Help them to rely on Your boundless mercy and to trust that their little one, who has been gathered into Your loving arms, will rise on the Last Day; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (553)

**C** Amen.

BURIAL FOR A STILLBORN CHILD OR UNBAPTIZED CHILD

*If the body of the deceased has been present during this service but will not be buried, the following is spoken:*

- P** May God the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh.  
**C** **Amen.**

*If the service is taking place at the place of burial, the LORD'S PRAYER and BENEDICTION are omitted here.*

- P** Taught by our Lord and trusting His promises, we are bold to pray:

- C** **Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

*Matthew 6:9-13*

- P** The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and ✠ give you peace.

- C** **Amen.**

*Numbers 6:24-26*

## Committal

*The pastor leads the casket and the family to the place of interment. The following may be sung or said:*

### **Media vita in morte sumus** *(14th-century hymn)*

In the midst of life we | are in death;\*  
from whom can we | seek help?  
From You alone, | O Lord,\*  
who by our sins are justly | angered.  
Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful | Savior,\*  
deliver us not into the bitterness of e- | ternal death.

Lord, You know the secrets | of our hearts;\*  
shut not Your ears to our prayers, but spare us, | O Lord.

CHRISTIAN BURIAL

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful | Savior,\*  
deliver us not into the bitterness of e- | ternal death.

O worthy and e- | ternal Judge,\*  
do not let the pains of death turn us away from You at our | last hour.  
Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful | Savior,\*  
deliver us not into the bitterness of e- | ternal death.

**P** Let us pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, by Your three-day rest in the tomb You hallowed the graves of all Your children, promising resurrection to our mortal bodies. (Bless † this grave and) grant that the body of this child may sleep here in peace until You awaken him/her to glory, when he/she will see You face to face and know the splendor of the eternal God, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (551)

**C** Amen.

*The following passage from Holy Scripture is read.*

**P** The apostle Paul comforts us concerning the resurrection of the dead:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. . . . When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. *1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 54–57*

*Sand or earth may be poured on the casket in the sign of the cross while the pastor says:*

**P** It has pleased our heavenly Father in His wise providence to call this child to Himself. We now commit his/her body to the ground/its resting place; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subdue all things to Himself.

**C** Amen.

BURIAL FOR A STILLBORN CHILD OR UNBAPTIZED CHILD

*The pastor may place his hand on the head of the casket as he says:*

**P** May God the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh.

**C** Amen.

**P** Taught by our Lord and trusting His promises, we are bold to pray:

**C** **Our Father who art in heaven,**  
**hallowed be Thy name,**  
**Thy kingdom come,**  
**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;**  
**give us this day our daily bread;**  
**and forgive us our trespasses**  
**as we forgive those who trespass against us;**  
**and lead us not into temptation,**  
**but deliver us from evil.**

**For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory**  
**forever and ever. Amen.**

*Matthew 6:9-13*

**P** Almighty God, by the death of Your Son Jesus Christ You destroyed death and redeemed and saved Your little ones. By His bodily resurrection You brought life and immortality to light so that all who die in Him abide in peace and hope. Receive our thanks for the victory over death and the grave that He won for us. Keep us in everlasting communion with all who wait for Him on earth and with all in heaven who are with Him, for He is the resurrection and the life, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. (550)

**C** Amen.

*An appropriate hymn may be sung.*

**P** Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**C** **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

**P** Let us go forth in peace, in the name of the Lord.

**C** Amen.

**P** The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and ✠ give you peace.

**C** Amen.

*Numbers 6:24-26*

## ***Appendix F: Memorial Acts in Pregnancy Loss***

This list is taken directly from Elise Barrett's *What Was Lost: A Christian Journey through Miscarriage*.<sup>275</sup> One disclaimer is that her inclusion of particular organizations to support does not imply any endorsement or support for these organizations on behalf of this writer. They are simply what Barrett herself suggested.

### **Memorial Acts**

Some people choose to do something concrete in the lost child's name, something that will honor the child's memory by making a contribution to a good cause. Some possibilities:

Plant a tree or other special plant. (You could add a small plaque on the ground or eventually hang a special birdhouse or set of wind chimes in the tree. Some trees, rosebushes, and other perennial plants have names you might find symbolic.)

Give money to an appropriate organization. (The options are endless. Possibilities include organizations the parents are already committed to, such as their own church or local school; organizations like the March of Dimes that focus on infants who are born too early; organizations that care for children, such as orphanages, child crisis centers, or child support programs; and organizations whose mission has some connection to the unborn child's death date or projected due date.)

Give money to a particular child. (Some families have chosen to support a child through World Vision or a similar organization. You could also choose to pay for a child's cleft palate surgery or other need in memory of your own unborn child. Your pastor or missions team may know of a local child with needs you could help to meet.)

Sponsor an animal. (Many zoos and other organizations offer naming opportunities or chances to share in providing care for an animal for a certain length of time.)

Contribute to your hospital's neonatal intensive care unit in your unborn child's memory.

Work with a local charitable organization to provide diapers and formula for local needy mothers.

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<sup>275</sup> Barrett, *What Was Lost*, 133-134.

Ask whether your local hospital or doctor's office would let you provide (or contribute toward an existing program to provide) some sort of gift for other families who lose pregnancies (a baby memento, a keepsake Bible, a book, a prayer on a card.)

People sometimes find it meaningful to choose one or more items to keep in memory of their child. These memory items could be absolutely anything. What matters is that you (and your partner) select something that is special to you and reminds you of your child. Ideas might include:

A keepsake jewelry item (Artists can produce customized pieces for you; options might include a bracelet with name or date engraved on it, a birthstone ring, or a special necklace.)

A memorial plaque (You could engrave a Scripture passage or simply your child's name and the date of your miscarriage. This could be placed in your own garden, but you could also ask your pastor if your church has a memorial garden, columbarium area, or other place where it might be appropriate to place something small. Some churches might have opportunities to place a piece of sculpture or furniture in a garden or room in memory of your unborn child, but most churches have careful policies about grounds and buildings, so you will need to talk to your pastor before making any plans or setting your heart on a particular idea.)

A memory box (You could create or purchase a special box or just use a shoebox to hold ultrasound images, cards or dried flowers you received, records of your hospital or doctor visit(s), a baby book if you already started one for this child, copies of prayers or worship service bulletins, maternity clothing, the pregnancy test, baby clothes, or any other items you find meaningful.)

A candle to light on anniversaries (A short service to support a candle-lighting practice is in chapter 14.)

A natural item (Perhaps a certain flower was in bloom when you first became pregnant or when you lost the baby, or you might dry and keep a leaf from a tree outside the nursery window. Anything you associate with your lost baby or with God's presence during your grief would be appropriate.)

Something you (and your partner) shop for and select for the purpose (perhaps a special piece of artwork, a book of poetry, a musical instrument, or a Christmas tree ornament)

Something you (or your partner) create (If you draw or paint or sculpt, if you did needlework or knitting, if you garden or do woodworking, if you write poetry, essays, or music – any of these are more can give you an opportunity to create something special as a memorial piece.)