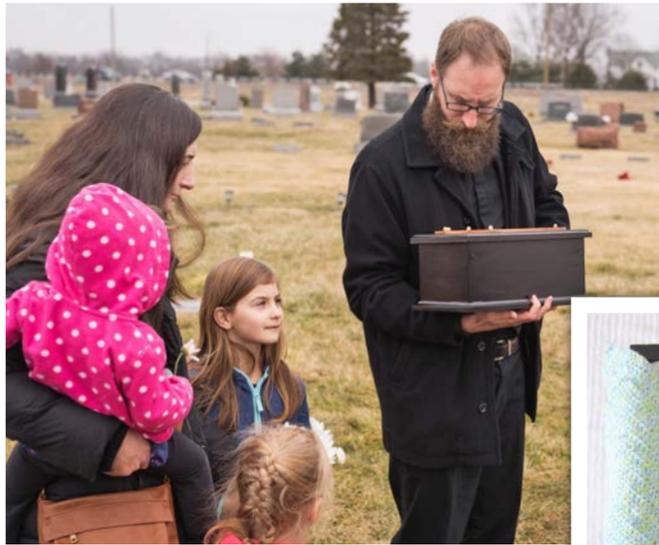


Caring for the least of these



The Daenzer family are pictured at their son Matthias' burial service. Rev. Sean is holding the casket (below) built by his father-in-law.



By Audrey Daenzer
St. Paul, Hamel

Christians marvel at God's creation of life in the womb. We believe that unborn babies are human beings, that Jesus died for them, that they can have faith. We strive to protect our smallest neighbors and prevent their murder. Yet when a baby's life ends — not by abortion, but by miscarriage or stillbirth — we aren't so sure how to react. Pregnancy loss is difficult to talk about, and no expectant couple wants to plan for the worst. Unfortunately, this leaves little guidance for grieving parents who are suddenly faced with a number of unexpected and difficult decisions. What do we do now? Should we let the hospital dispose of the remains? Is a funeral even possible?

Every pregnancy loss is unique, and there is no single "right" way to care for the bodies of these precious babies. Sometimes parents do not realize that it is possible to obtain their baby's remains after a medical procedure. Often it is not possible to preserve a body at all. Grieving families need not be burdened with unnecessary guilt or regret if their baby was not given a traditional burial. Christian parents can be comforted that their children are in Christ's care and that He will raise their bodies on the Last Day, no matter their place or manner of burial. However, it is also important for families to know

that a Christian burial is both possible and commendable for miscarried and stillborn babies — a clear confession of our hope in the resurrection.

My husband, Sean, and I are blessed with three living daughters, Lucia, 7, Monica, 5, and Renata, 2. We also have a daughter and son who await the resurrection of the dead. On Ash Wednesday 2017, we learned at a routine 20-week ultrasound that our unborn baby had died in the womb at about 17 weeks gestation. We named our little girl Perpetua Felicity, after the early Christian martyrs. Our son, Matthias John, was



Lucia Daenzer places flowers on her brother's grave.

miscarried at about 16 weeks in January 2020, just days before our family planned to move from North Dakota to Illinois. Both babies were delivered in our hospital's birthing center. Kind nurses took their handprints and footprints, recorded their length and weight and wrapped them in receiving blankets for us to hold. Even in our heartbreak, we marveled at their little faces (Matthias' eyes were already open) and their perfectly formed fingers with tiny fingernails. These were undeniably human beings, created by God and as such we wanted to care for our children, even in death.

Perpetua was buried near our church in rural North Dakota on a bitterly cold March afternoon. We walked from our home to the cemetery behind the pastor, who read Scripture as we went. "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O LORD, hear my voice!" (Ps. 130:1-2). My father built her wooden casket. I crocheted a miniature blanket to place inside. The graveside service included the hymn "Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me" (LSB #756). Our two older daughters carried pink carnations to place on the grave.

Matthias' burial service was held at the cemetery of our new church, St. Paul, Hamel. Once again, my father built a beautiful casket, I made a tiny blanket and our daughters held flowers in their mittened hands. Our pastor read many of the same psalms and prayers that we had heard at Perpetua's service. We



The ground is prepared for burial of Matthias' casket by St. Paul pastors, from left, Revs. Benjamin Ball, William Weedon and William Gleason.

sang "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart" (LSB #708). Several family members and friends came to mourn with us.

And so we tucked our children in, for the first and last time, to await the return of their Lord. Perpetua's headstone reads, "In Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). Matthias' marker will have the same epitaph.

When death comes before Baptism, we trust in [God's] 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. (LSB Agenda, "Burial for a Stillborn Child or Unbaptized Child")

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Support for those who have lost a child to miscarriage

Here are some ways in which you can respectfully care for your baby's body, depending on the situation:



- ▶ First, call your pastor. His job is to speak Christ's Words of comfort, peace and forgiveness to you. He may offer to make a home visit. You can also ask him to pray with you before a surgical procedure or visit you in the hospital after delivery. Request his guidance in planning a burial service (the rite for "Burial for a Stillborn Child or Unbaptized Child" is included in both the *LSB Agenda* and *Pastoral Care Companion*).
- ▶ Babies miscarried at home can be refrigerated in a container of water or saline (like contact solution) for a few days. If burial must be delayed, keep the container in the freezer (without liquid).
- ▶ Remember you have the right to obtain your baby's remains for burial, even if you experience resistance from medical staff. Inform them of your request before beginning any procedures. You may need to work with a funeral home (your pastor can recommend one). State laws may affect requirements for transporting or burying your baby's body.
- ▶ Name your baby. It's never too late to give your child a name.
- ▶ Hold and spend time with your baby. You can ask a nurse to describe your child's appearance to you first or to bring the baby to you wrapped in a blanket.
- ▶ Take photographs, as many as possible. Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep provides free photography sessions for stillborn babies nationwide. Visit nowilaymedowntosleep.org.
- ▶ Invite family and friends to attend the burial service. Even if you prefer a smaller gathering, allow your fellow Christians to be present to comfort you in your grief and to hear with you the proclamation that "Death is swallowed up in victory: 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

Audrey Daenzer and her husband, Sean, have five children, two of whom await the resurrection. Pastor Sean serves as director of LCMS Worship and chaplain at the LCMS International Center in Kirkwood, Mo.



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