



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Editor: Kiply Lukan Yaworski, Communications
Phone: 306-242-1500; Toll Free: 1-877-661-5005
communications@saskatoonrcdiocese.com



Members of the Miscarriage Awareness Committee: *Back row, left to right:* Russ Hannan, Deb Bauche, Carol Kostiuk, Ethna Martin, Blake Sittler; *Front, l-r:* Shirley Hannan, Elan Ehresman, and Shannon Granger, holding daughter Alexis. (Fr. Kevin McGee has also worked with the committee.)

Miscarriage Awareness Committee presents information at diocesan Administration Day

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Faith communities are called to reach out to those suffering the loss of a child through miscarriage – but it can be difficult to know how to respond, or where to find resources to help. A new diocesan Miscarriage Awareness Committee is working to fill that gap.

In a presentation to pastors, parish and ministry leaders from across the diocese at an Administration Day Sept. 7, 2011, committee members shared personal stories about the impact of a miscarriage on women, couples and families. They also suggested possible pastoral responses, and pointed to resources now posted on the diocesan website.

Elan Ehresman works with the committee as part of her role as coordinator of Ministry Development and of the Marriage and Family Life offices in the diocese. She said getting involved in the Miscarriage Awareness Committee opened her eyes to what is often a hidden pain.

CONTINUED



“I have learned much about the suffering associated with miscarriage, about the need for healing, and about the longing for acknowledgment,” she said of her involvement with the new committee, which was the first time she had encountered the issue.

“It has become really important for me to celebrate life from its very beginnings,” Ehresman said. When women delay in announcing a pregnancy, waiting until they get past the first few months, they may be cutting themselves off from much-needed support if their child is lost in a miscarriage, she noted. “Let’s celebrate that life,” she said. “And if that child dies, we can be a compassionate people, and a support for those mourning the loss of a child.”

Shannon Granger’s experience of a miscarriage led her and husband Dan to seek support from their faith community – and their journey prompted the establishment of the Miscarriage Awareness Committee.

“We have four babies, but we have only met three of them,” Shannon said with emotion, sharing the experience of losing her third child.

“I was healthy, the baby was normal, and I even heard the baby’s heartbeat in December,” she said. “At an appointment in January, my doctor could not find a heartbeat. We went for an ultrasound and my doctor confirmed there was no heartbeat. My baby had died, most likely three weeks earlier. So 2010 did not start out well for our family.”

Shannon added: “We were very fortunate that we had told our family and friends about the pregnancy, so that when we had to tell them that we had lost the baby, we experienced an enormous outpouring of love and support.”

She said experiencing this loss gave her new insight into the suffering of friends and family who had miscarriages in the past. “I never understood, saying

common phrases, like ‘you can try again’ or ‘at least it was early’ – not understanding how hurtful those words were, until it happened to us.”

Through conversations with friends and family, and with others who had lost babies through miscarriage, Shannon and Dan decided they wanted to have a church service. With the pastor’s support, they planned a Liturgy of the Word to celebrate and remember their baby.

“It didn’t take long for me to realize that the grief of miscarriage can often be overlooked, and is often not shared outside the immediate family, which means many couples and single mothers suffer alone,” said Granger.

“Also, in preparing our liturgy, Father Lawrence had said he hadn’t been part of a service or celebration in the case of a miscarriage in all of his years of being a priest.”

This was a stunning revelation, given how many families are affected by miscarriage, she said. “The richness of our tradition in liturgical worship, and the power of communal prayer are under utilized when it comes to miscarriage.”

Through conversations that Shannon initiated with the diocesan office of Marriage and Family Life, the Miscarriage Awareness Committee was eventually established to address Miscarriage Awareness, which has now gathered a range of information and resources. Posted on the diocesan website at www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/miscarriage are materials on what to say and do when someone has suffered a miscarriage; a number of liturgies and memorial services, including a naming ceremony; and grieving information.

CONTINUED



“As for my family, 2010 ended very well, with the birth of Alexis,” concluded Granger.

Shirley and Russ Hannan, a couple married some 32 years, spoke about their experience as a couple affected by four miscarriages: in 1981, 1982 1985 and 2004. “These are dates that are forever etched in our lives,” said Russ.

“For so long, no one ever talked about miscarriage. I don’t really think people thought about it as a loss for a family. It was just something to get over,” said Shirley.

“We have been taught that life begins at conception, and we really need to step up and show that we believe this by recognizing families at their time of loss with compassion and understanding,” added Russ.

The pregnancy that ended in miscarriage in 2004 was a surprise to the Hannans, who by that time had three grown children. “It came as a complete shock. We ended up in emergency with the remains of a tiny baby that fit in the palm of our hands,” recalled Shirley. A compassionate nurse explained the options, and the Hannans, still in shock, opted to have their baby interred in a shared garden plot available at Woodlawn Memorial Gardens.

Later, the couple learned there was a service every June at Woodlawn for all those who had lost children through miscarriage. “I attended the service on my own as Russ was out of town. Father Kevin McGee led the service,” said Shirley. “There

were a lot more people there than I expected, affected by miscarriage. Every story was different, but they all had the loss of life, whether it was two weeks, or full term. A life had begun, and a life had ended.”

Twenty-five percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage, defined as the loss of a fetus before the 20th week of pregnancy, said committee member Carol Kostiuk, one of four parish nurses serving in parishes in the diocese of Saskatoon.

“I feel part of my ministry encompasses awareness around miscarriages, both in the capacity of information and programming in the parishes, as well as for the priests,” she said. “Looking back on the stats, complete with the knowledge that the loss of life is vitally important no matter when it happens, gives us the momentum to move forward.”

She advocated building bridges of knowledge, compassion and healing services to help the grieving family, recalling her own experience. “We dealt with it on our own,” she said of the loss of her baby. “It would have meant so much to us if we could have just talked to someone in our parish who had experienced a miscarriage too.”

Kostiuk also said it is important to ask priests and pastoral workers to reach out to parishioners by having the subject mentioned, by offering services, or by having the subject validated by such measures as having miscarriages included in the book of remembrance in November.