ORCHESTRA FOR OLIVER

Even the Shortest Lives Are Special

Resource for parents who have experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth

"I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15–16).

Orchestra for Oliver is a picture book about an expectant family who receives a prenatal diagnosis. Little Oliver survives to birth and is baptized but then dies.

The experience of miscarriage is very different from that of neonatal loss or even stillbirth. Below are some areas that were, therefore, not addressed in the book. At the end there are some tips for reading *Orchestra for Oliver* with your children.

"Oliver had a name, but I don't even know if my baby was a boy or girl."

If your miscarriage was early in your pregnancy, or if you had decided to wait until birth to know the gender of your baby, you may not know if your baby was a boy or a girl.

You can name your baby anyway! Here are some ways to approach it:

- Some women have an intuition as to whether their baby was a girl or boy. If you felt that inkling at some point, then go with it and name your baby based on that.
- Pray about the name and ask God for guidance regarding what name to give your baby.
- Name your baby after a saint whose feast day is on the date of miscarriage or burial or original due date. (Here is a site with the feast days of saints: https://www.vaticannews.va/en/saints.html)
- Give your baby a name that could be for both boys or girls, e.g., Francis/Frances.
- Give your baby both a boy's and a girl's name, e.g., Joseph Mary.

"In the story, Oliver's sister knows about his existence, but my children didn't yet know that they had an unborn sibling."

- Consider telling your other children about your miscarriage. When you lost a child, they lost a sibling. This story might be helpful in that communication, especially if your children are very young, or if the miscarriage happened a while ago.

- Some families keep a miscarriage quiet because they don't think it will matter to another child if that child did not know of the baby's existence. However, siblings have frequently expressed regret that they did not know about their deceased sibling until they were older. It is never too late to let any siblings know of a miscarriage. That being said, it is still up to you regarding who you let know about your miscarriage.

"My baby was not baptized like Oliver, but the Church teaches that Baptism is necessary for salvation, so what happens to miscarried babies?"

God is never outdone in love and generosity. We can find comfort in knowing that our miscarried babies are in his merciful keeping. (See paragraphs 1257–1261 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.)

The Church prays in the opening prayer for the funeral Mass of a child who dies before Baptism:

> "O God, searcher of hearts and most loving consoler,
> who know the faith of these parents,
> grant that, as they mourn their child,
> now departed from this life,
> they may be assured
> that he (she) has been entrusted to your divine compassion.
> Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
> who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
> God for ever and ever. Amen." (Order of Christian Funerals, no. 282, option D)

"I was not able to bury my baby the way Oliver was able to be buried."

If you did not bury your baby because you did not know you could, had an early miscarriage and could not find your baby, or because of some other similar reason, you did nothing wrong. You did the best you could in a horrible situation. Here are some things to know going forward:

- You are allowed to place your baby's name on your future gravestone along with your other children's names.
- Your miscarried baby can be included in your future obituary.
- If your baby's remains are still at home, it can be very healing to bury the baby either on a family plot or in a section at a cemetery that is dedicated to the burial of miscarried babies. See here for a list, or for help finding one: https://covenantresources.org/burials/
- If you unfortunately have a miscarriage again in the future, please know that:

  — You are allowed to bury everything you pass if it is an early miscarriage and you are unable to find the baby, with the assumption that the baby is present.

  — Same-day supplies for recovering and burying your miscarried baby's remains are offered in some areas (see here for a list: https://covenantresources.org/burials/miscarriage-burial-supplies/).

  — If supplies are not offered in your area, you can work with a local church or medical or funeral facility to see if they will start offering same-day miscarriage burial supplies in case you need

them again in the future or if you want to ensure that other families in your area have access to these supplies. See here for more information: https://covenantresources.org/product-category/miscarriage-supply-totes/

"At the end of the story, Oliver's family plants a garden to remember him. What can I do to preserve the memory of my child?"

- Have a memorial Mass offered for your baby or for "babies lost to miscarriage" each year.
- Do something to remember your baby each year during the month or on the day of your miscarriage or the original due date. It can be something simple like a special dessert for the whole family. It can also be something more elaborate such as using the money you would have spent on a birthday gift to give a donation or a supply to a nonprofit that assists families with unborn children.
- Get a memorial ornament (https://covenantresources.org/product-category/ornaments/) for your Christmas tree in place of a "Baby's First Christmas" ornament.
- If you have an ultrasound picture of your baby, display that picture or a copy of it along with your other family photos.
- Some families have turned their grief into good by reaching out to others because of their experience. You can help start a cemetery in your area (see https://covenantresources.org/burials/little-souls-cemeteries/). You can ensure there are same-day miscarriage recovery and burial supplies available in your area (see https://covenantresources.org/product-category/miscarriage-supply-totes/). Their availability will educate families that they are allowed to bury their miscarried babies and will provide the resources to do so. You can also do something as simple as letting your church know that you had a miscarriage and that if any other parishioners have a miscarriage, they can be given your phone number if they would like to just talk with another mother who has also had a miscarriage.
- See further suggestions at the end of *Orchestra for Oliver*, in the "Keeping Memories" section.

"This is not my first miscarriage. Is there any medical help available that is in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church?"

Yes, there is. The Creighton Model FertilityCare System and NaproTECHNOLOGY work together to try to help a woman who is having repeat miscarriages or is struggling with infertility. This method works with the woman's body and respects the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding medical care and the dignity of marriage, family, and all human life. More information can be found at https://covenantresources.org/resources/medical-help/ .

Suggestions for Reading *Orchestra for Oliver* with Your Children

- This book talks about joyful music pouring out the window. Talk with your children about how they felt when they found out they were going to have a new little brother or sister.
- This book talks about the baby growing inside the momma's belly. Your children may enjoy seeing any ultrasound pictures or an online picture of what their baby brother or sister would have looked like based on how old he or she was.

- The book states that "from the time babies are breathed into being, they know our love." This is an appropriate place to explain to children that the moment that babies are breathed into being, they are also made in the image and likeness of God with an eternal soul that continues to live on even though they are no longer here with us physically.
- In this book Oliver's family decides to make family memories. With a miscarriage, it may not have been known that the memories that were made would be the only ones. Talk about things that your family did together while the baby was still alive, and what memories would have been made with the baby even if unknown at the time. You can also talk with your children about what memories they would have liked to have made with their baby brother or sister.
- Oliver's family was able to see him and hold him. In a miscarriage this may not be possible, and the gender of the baby may be unknown. You can talk with your children about who they envision the baby to be and what they think he or she looks like. This helps them see that even if they could not see the baby with their own eyes, he or she was a real living person.
- Oliver's family was able to have a funeral. If a funeral Mass was not said for your miscarried baby, talk with your children about how you are still able to have a memorial Mass said for your baby.

This resource was provided by Rebecca Harpring of Covenant Resources Miscarriage Ministry™

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Orchestra for Oliver: Even the Shortest Lives Are Special may be purchased from www.paulinestore.com.

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