

Five things I wish my pastor knew about infertility

Dear Father,

Roughly 1 in 8 couples experience infertility, and what this means for individual marriages varies. Pastors are in a unique position to spiritually care for parishioners who carry this cross, but you may not know how many in your pews suffer with it, or how to minister to them. Here are some things we want you to know that can help you spiritually father us through this sensitive and difficult struggle:

There are two kinds of infertility.

Primary infertility refers to the difficulty or inability to conceive. A couple experiencing secondary infertility has one or more children, but is unable to expand their family further. It also refers to couples who have conceived but were unable to bring their child(ren) to term. Both kinds of infertility are painful but each is grieved differently.

We need prayers!

We want you to pray for us, especially when we're actively trying to conceive and utilizing medical interventions approved of by the Church, but having difficulty. Sometimes, in our desperation, we look to prayer and recourse to certain saints known to help couples to conceive as "magic solutions." If our prayers aren't answered as we'd wish, we may fear God or the saint is ignoring us, or that we are being punished. Help us to pray with trust and confidence, asking God to hear us, but focusing less on results and more on trusting that He is good and wants the best for us.

Mother's Day is hard.

We love moms! They have an important, tough, wonderful job and they should be acknowledged. But those of us who long to be mothers and carry the cross of infertility are especially sad on Mother's Day. Our husbands may bear it differently, but they certainly carry the weight of our sadness with them. Some of us may skip Mass on that day because it's hard to stay seated when all the moms are asked to stand for a special blessing. We're not looking for special treatment, or that mothers shouldn't be acknowledged. We just want you to know, Father, that many of us are suffering silently in our pews. There are some creative ways to honor mothers while acknowledging the particular motherhood (godmother, aunt, spiritual mother) to which all women are called.

Our struggle is real—and private.

It takes courage for us to share our struggle with infertility with anyone, and especially with you, our spiritual Father. We feel ashamed, guilty (is God punishing us?), and we wonder if people assume we're contracepting or don't want children. When we do find the courage to share our story with you, we want you to check in with us, but just not in front of other parishioners.

We want you to walk with us.

Infertility is a lonely, isolating place; a desert. We need prayer, and we need someone to accompany us, encourage us and help us as a couple to grow closer to God and each other. We'd like you to pray with and for us for the blessing of a child; but we also want you to pray that our hearts will be open to the unique fruitfulness God wants to give us. Help us to cultivate the virtue of hope and maintain our trust in God, even if the fruit of our marital love is not a biological child. You don't have to worry about what to say to us; just be with us.

For more resources, visit us at www.springsinthedesert.org.

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