

Five things I wish my pastor knew about infertility

Dear Father,

Roughly 1 in 5 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 is no "one kind" of infertility.

Some women have never been pregnant (primary infertility), or have one or more living children and want to grow their families but have trouble conceiving again (secondary infertility). Some couples suffer miscarriage coupled with infertility. In some cases, male factor infertility (and a range of other diagnoses) makes conception difficult or impossible. Every circumstance brings with it unique grief and challenges.

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. We might pray to certain saints known to help couples to conceive but, in our desperation and grief, we can view these saints and prayers 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 and develop spiritual friendships with the saints. Encourage us to focus less on results and more on the truth that God loves us and has many good gifts 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 carry the cross of infertility are especially sad on Mother's Day, and it's really difficult to stay seated during the special blessing. Our husbands may bear it differently, but they certainly carry the weight of our sadness with them. We're not looking for special treatment, or that mothers shouldn't be acknowledged. We just want you to know that many of us are suffering silently in our pews. We'd love you to consider honoring mothers while also acknowledging the particular motherhood (as godmothers, aunts, spiritual mothers, mentors, etc.) to which all women are called.

Our struggle is real—and private.

It takes courage for us to share our infertility struggle with anyone, and especially with you, our spiritual father. We may 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 appreciate your sensitivity, compassion, and discretion. Ask us how we're doing and if we need anything, but please don't ask 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 ways God wants us to be fruitful. Remind us that our marriage is good, and a witness to Christ's love in the world. 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. Don't worry about what to say to us; just be with us.

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

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