

# Creating A Very Special Place

by Henry J. Drux,  
Gary Diocesan Cemeteries



According to Catholic Church teachings all of human life, which begins at the very moment of conception, is sacred. This important doctrine is often referred to concerning the abortion issue, which

is the intentional ending of human life before birth. However, in the case of miscarriage the human life within the mother's womb ends involuntarily. When this tragic event occurs, do Catholic hospitals and Catholic cemeteries share the

responsibility to see that the remains of these very small human lives receive a respectful burial? The office staff at St. John/St. Joseph Cemetery in Hammond, Indiana decided to re-evaluate the cemetery policies regarding the burial of miscarried babies. While the cemetery had provided this charitable service in cooperation with a local Catholic hospital for many decades, was our practice of placing them into whatever grave that was open at the time a respectful manner of Christian burial?

Our immediate interest in reviewing the policy and had been precipitated by what seemed to be an increasing number of inquiries by mothers and fathers as to the burial location of their miscarried baby, often lost decades before.

Initially we concluded that a specific section for these burials would need

to be developed. But, should we also take into consideration the point of view of those who have personally experienced this tragedy and their expectations when they would, at some future date, make an inquiry?

My assistant, Barbara White was given the assignment to research early pregnancy loss and the long term effects on parents. We thought that perhaps we could apply what was learned into the planning for the project.

Barbara began by checking for information on the internet. She discovered there was indeed a great deal of information indicating that there is a direct correlation between miscarriage and long term grief effects on parents. Interestingly, Barbara also found there is a growing awareness among grief experts that parents often mourn the loss of a miscarried fetus no differently then they would that of a child carried until full term.

All too often when a miscarriage occurs, parents are left without a tangible life and no memories over which to grieve. Grief experts have only recently begun to understand the emotional complexities over loss as a result of miscarriage. Since grief is a normal response to the loss of someone significant in our lives, it is

often marked with a funeral. However the same does not apply to miscarried babies because the traditional funeral does not take place. As a result, this can become an eventual source of anguish and emotional sorrow. There now seems to be a much greater need to recognize the emotional and psychological effects that accompany an early pregnancy loss which may occur not only in the short term, but also in the very long term as well.

The information Barbara acquired seemed to confirm our own experiences of when a parent would request a location for their miscarried baby. Because of our new understanding of the difficulties that parents may suffer, it was clear to us that some special area of the cemetery would be far from appropriate for this new section. We all agreed to select a visible location and to develop it into a very special place where parents, who grieve the loss of a child they never had the chance to hold in their arms, could find a place of comfort where they could remember a life that was all too brief.

After careful consideration a site under the shade of a large oak tree was selected. This place was chosen for its prominent location and because it is a place of quiet serenity. This particular area is also large enough to allow for burials to continue for many years. Our next consideration was to consider a suitable feature for the area which not only was respectful, but also conveyed the grief of parents, as well as their belief in Our Lord's message of life everlasting.

Among the many benefits I have experienced in attending the Catholic Cemetery Conference conventions is the opportunity to meet many suppliers who are always willing to assist with their talents. On one such occasion I met someone who I hoped would be able to make our somewhat vague concept of a *Very Special Place* into a reality. The cemetery manager, Michael Welsh,

was asked to contact **Inspired Artisans, Ltd.** of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and explain our concept to Gianfranco Tassara.

I had spent some time with Mr. Tassara while at a convention, and I remembered being impressed with work he had completed for other cemeteries. In his initial conversation with Gianfranco, Mike related the events which had initiated our desire to develop this special place within the cemetery. Along with his explanation Mike's only other request was that Gianfranco create for us a bronze statue which would stand on a granite base.

Within one month Mr. Tassara met with us to show his sketch of a statue he hoped would meet with our approval. The drawing he presented showed a woman embracing her child while looking towards the heavens seeking consolation. We knew instantly that he had captured the grief experience of those who had come to the cemetery in search

of the burial place of their child that they had never had the opportunity to hold in their arms. Gianfranco also suggested that the statue be placed on an octagonal base which would symbolize the Sacrament of Baptism.

It was decided to entitle the sculpture *Providence*, which means "in the protective care of God."

Father Roy Beeching and I met with the Most Reverend Dale Melczek, Bishop of the Diocese of Gary to present the project and ask for his approval of the plans. During this meeting we were able to inform him that we had met with Deacon Tom Gryzbach and Gene Diamond, the administrators of St. Margaret Healthcare Centers, and that they had offered to underwrite the expenses of the project.

Bishop Melczek took particular interest in our learning experience regarding long term grief effects on parents who had lost a baby due to

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