

Our little angels

THOSE who have been spared the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain of a miscarriage may not appreciate what a wonderful thing two cemeteries in the Diocese of Peoria have done by dedicating space as memorials for miscarried children.

Miscarriage hits a lot of homes. There were some 3,600 infant baptisms in the Diocese of Peoria last year. Using current estimates that about 30 percent of all pregnancies end in miscarriage — though admittedly some occur so early that the pregnancy may never have been detected — it is safe to say that thousands of parents in the diocese have experienced this trauma.

I am one of them.

My wife and I suffered two miscarriages prior to the birth of our healthy daughter. Each happened about three months into the pregnancy. The moments of the actual events, one in the hospital and the other at home, are seared into our memories. My wife was shown the first child. I was not. With the second, I had to gather the tissues as evidence to take to the hospital. These were dreadful times.

Miscarriages at that point for the mother involve the pains of labor, with most of the physical pain coming after the fetus has been expelled. And then the emotional pain takes over. I recall shakily returning home from the hospital and seeing our mantel lined with well-wishing cards from family and

friends who had heard our good news. Should I take them down before my wife returned home? More distant friends asked us months later how our new baby was doing.

I share these personal stories only because, as we later learned, we were not alone in our experience. And while comfort at those times of shattered hopes was hard to find, it did help to know that this was not happening only to us. For those that require them, support groups such as the Little Angels in Danville and SHARE in Peoria provide great service.

The Lord through His gifts of time and faith healed our wounds. With a healthy toddler now bringing immeasurable joy to our home, the pain of the miscarriages is not often recalled. But until this week, I had never even thought of one unresolved part of it all.

I can point to the spot in my hometown yard where I buried a family cat. In the garden of my present yard, under a statue of St. Francis, rests a canary who was a part of our family for five years. But until this week, I had no idea where my two unborn children rested.

Now I know. On behalf of the hundreds who will pray and remember at these two new memorials, I thank Resurrection and St. Mary's cemeteries, and encourage other Catholic cemeteries in the diocese, if they have not done so already, to consider doing the same. — *Thomas J. Dermody*