

There's one thing that everyone has in common. **We all have a mother.** No one who ever lived came into being without a mother. I suppose that's why we celebrate Mother's Day – to celebrate the person who gave us life. On the other hand – we also celebrate National Pet Day and Casimir Polaski Day, so the reason behind the naming of the day may be more commercial than commemorative, but be that as it may – it is still worth honoring our mothers.

Many of us were raised by God-fearing mothers - women of integrity, love, and compassion - and we are forever grateful to God that they showed us how to love and taught us life principles - held us when we failed, cried with us when we were wounded, and celebrated with us when we succeeded.

But if we are honest with each other, some of us will have to admit that our "mother experience" didn't quite fit this ideal or was so far from the ideal that it was off the radar screen completely. It might be hard for us to find the right mother's day card – the card that **doesn't** say that our mother was always loving, always supportive, always wanting the best for us.

What should we do – should we just pretend that the painful past didn't happen? Should we put on rose-colored glasses and re-shape our memories? Should we gloss over the imperfections that stare us in the face everyday?

I'm not sure what your particular situation is and certainly don't claim to have all the answers. But I do believe that we must be honest with ourselves. We need to admit that our mother wasn't perfect – that even though in many cases she was well-meaning, she still had mixed motivations, and without even realizing it, she bruised our spirits, shattered our dreams, or smothered us so we could barely breathe. That sometimes life was so hard for her that caring for a child was just too overwhelming. That maybe she was just a child in a grown body – one whose emotions and ability to love never matured. That perhaps she herself was raised by a flawed mother.

Lewis Smedes, a well-known theologian and ethicist, said that the first step towards forgiveness is naming the hurt. The second step is blaming the person – not necessarily to her face, but saying out loud – *"My mother hurt me. I did not deserve that hurt."* The third step is the toughest – giving up the right to get even, and eventually, in time, the fourth step will occur – being able to wish her well.

You may even be able to find just the right card – the card that honestly gives respect to the person who brought you into this world, regardless of her failures, understanding that each of us stands in the need of forgiveness and the grace of God.

While we are in the "let's be honest" mode, we would be amiss if we didn't acknowledge the white elephant on Mother's Day—the white elephant called **Infertility.**

There are women who would give anything to be able to be mothers – to bring a life into this world – to give that life all of their love and time and energy and support. These women's very arms and hearts ache every time they hear of another successful pregnancy, another joyful baptism, another mention of Mother's Day.

They struggle physically with the poking and prodding and often painful procedures meant to increase their chances of having a baby.

They struggle emotionally from all the ups and downs – "could it be this month?"

They struggle spiritually – Where is God? Has he abandoned me? Is he punishing me? Does he care? Can I trust him?

Infertility is such a private problem – it's hard to tell your family, it's difficult to admit that you are having trouble in such an intimate part of your life, and it feels like an invasion of your privacy to think that people are talking about you.

There are no easy answers or solutions. It's difficult - no one is denying that.

Recently, I read an article in Focus on the Family – *Babyless* by Andrea Stephens. (November, 1994) It's a story of Andrea and Bill's struggle with infertility. After years of attempts and repeated failure to become pregnant, Andrea wrote this: *"As I read Jeremiah 29: 11-12 – 'for I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and*

come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart', the Holy Spirit whispered, 'Andrea, for nearly seven years you have been trusting medical science more than Me. You have been seeking Me with only half of your heart.' I knew it was true. In my struggle to understand my inability to have a baby, I went to great lengths to make God look like the good guy by seeking every new medical treatment and blaming repeated failures on the doctors. I had wanted to protect God; I also wanted to protect myself. I kept assuring my family and friends that God had a plan for us. If He chose for Bill and me to be childless, I noted then we could serve Him in other ways. I was willing to accept that—well, most of the time. Yet deep down, I was afraid to stop trying to make a pregnancy happen and rest confidently in the One who had promised to supply all my needs according to His plan. I had given God half my heart, while I was controlling the rest. Seeking God with my whole heart was too scary. What if He let me down? What if He never gave us a baby? Yet, I needed to seek His will and rely on His wisdom. I knew it would take everything I had. But was I ready? As I bowed my head that day two years ago, I knew I had a choice. The fear began to slowly fade as I placed my hand into the trustworthy palm of my loving Lord, offering Him my whole heart."

Does this mean that she and her husband shouldn't have tried all the scientific procedures available to them? Not necessarily. But it does mean that ultimately God is in control and that in your trying to get pregnant and in your waiting and in your disappointments, you trust - trust that God knows what He is doing - trust that it is in the going through the struggle that we learn the heart of God - and trust that He loves you more than life itself.

May is Mental Health Month

"People with mental problems are our neighbors. They are members of our congregations, members of our families; they are everywhere in this country. If we ignore their cries for help, we will be continuing to participate in the anguish from which those cries for help come. A problem of this magnitude will not go away. Because it will not go away, and because of our spiritual commitments, we are compelled to take action." Roselynn Carter

What can congregations do?

- Address stress and mental health in worship and newsletters
- Provide opportunity to reevaluate the priorities in our lives
- Be aware of signs and symptoms of persons who need support
- Offer support groups or one-to-one mentors
- Be knowledgeable of referral resources in the local community
- Use the rituals of your faith for comfort, strength and hope

Symptoms of Depression

- Loss of interest in normal daily activities
- Feeling sad or down
- Feeling hopeless
- Crying spells for no apparent reason
- Problems sleeping or oversleeping
- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Unintentional weight gain or loss
- Irritability
- Restlessness

Resources for Congregations

www.nami.org/faithnet; www.MentalHealthMinistries.net; www.LoveYourLifeWell.org;