

Angel Babies help parents deal with loss

Jennifer Schall was pregnant with her third child when she had a miscarriage. Although she was upset she still wanted to have more children. She became pregnant again and at 36 weeks her baby died suddenly in her womb.

Mrs. Schall eventually had two more healthy babies, but the loss of her children stayed with her. She decided to start a support group called Angel Babies for anyone who has lost a child. The group meets at St. Margaret, Bel Air, each month.

"It's for mothers and families dealing with early infant death, still births or miscarriages," said Mrs. Schall. "It's a chance for people to share stories and remember their child."

Mrs. Schall said the group is a place for people to feel comfortable with each other and open up about their sorrow whether they lost a child weeks ago or years ago. They meet for an hour to discuss their feelings and pray together, and the group is open to anyone no matter their religion.

Mrs. Schall explained that with an early miscarriage there is cramping, heavy bleeding, physical pain and possibly a trip to the hospital or doctor's office. A miscarriage later in a pregnancy is considered a still birth, where a woman must go to the hospital and go through delivery even though the child is dead.

The mother of four said having a still birth is very difficult emotionally and physically because women become attached to the child growing inside them. The woman gets to hear the heartbeat, she has a sonogram and she pictures this tiny creature being born. Mrs. Schall said even though her son was born dead she still held him, named him and took pictures with him.

"Everyone associates a baby with joy; not this time," said the Angel Babies facilitator. "It was very hard to go on and attempt to have more children."

She said many women are afraid to try to have more children after a miscarriage

because they don't want to go through the experience again.

"My desire to have more children was greater than my fear of having a miscarriage and a still birth," said Mrs. Schall.

Mrs. Schall said people find it hard to talk about this loss to other people. She recommended that friends and family become good listeners to those who have experienced miscarriages, still births or early infant deaths. She also suggested women or anyone affected by loss of a child join a support group, talk to compassionate friends, write in a journal and do something special on the day the child died.

Mrs. Schall planted a memorial garden for her son near her children's playground so they have a remembrance of him. On the day her son died the family will color pictures and "send them to heaven" or release balloons to celebrate him.

"Having a miscarriage was not as hard as having a still birth, but having a baby die after you have taken him home and bonded can be harder," said Mrs. Schall. "You have to be thankful for the time that you have with your babies."

The next meeting of the Angel Babies will be June 11 at St. Margaret in the parish office conference room at 7:30 p.m.