

Rethinking How We Celebrate Mother's Day

By Taryn Hutchison

Mother's Day is supposed to be a happy celebration, but it is a joyless day for many.

"It was the Sunday I hated most of the whole year," writes Marlo Schalesky in her book Empty Womb, Aching Heart. "There was a huge vase at the front of the church filled with dozens of beautiful long-stemmed pink roses. . . One rose for each mother in the congregation. Of course, I wouldn't receive one because I was childless."

Twelve percent of women of childbearing age in the United States, or 7.3 million, will have difficulty getting pregnant or carrying a baby to term, according to the National Infertility Association's Survey of Family Growth.

In a church of 300 people, more than 20 women could be silently struggling with fertility issues.

"It got to the point where I couldn't handle going to church on Mother's Day," Cate (not her real name) said. "All the sermons about the importance of motherhood – they were preaching to the choir with me."

Cate and her husband had spent the past 10 years on some sort of fertility drug. Every month, disappointment took the place of hope.

"What I needed to hear was that I still had value as a non-mother," Cate said. "Seeing all the happy women just magnified my unhappiness. I would sit there and sob. So I stopped going. My husband would go and make excuses for me."

There's another reason Mother's Day may not be cause to celebrate.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, two million babies die in their first 24 hours each year.

Last Mother’s Day, Emily (not her real name) walked into church alone. The greeters reached around her to pin a carnation on the next woman.

“But I’m a mother, too. I’ll always be Jack’s mommy,” Emily said later.

She had carried Jack for nine months, given birth to him, loved him, and cared for him. She had even been forced to do something that most of these smiling women with corsages had never done. She had buried her son.

Her two-month old baby had died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. People in the church expressed their sympathy at that time, but soon seemed to forget about Jack.

Everything had been so different just one year earlier. Obviously expecting, Emily had received her carnation. It was a day filled with promise. But Mother’s Day will no longer be a happy day for her.

With so many hurting mothers and childless women, perhaps we, as the body of Christ, can rethink how we recognize Mother’s Day. How do we esteem the invaluable role of motherhood while still providing comfort and hope to those who grieve? Is it worth encouraging some women (the ones whose healthy children appreciate them) at the expense of making the others feel a whole lot worse?

How do we put into practice the words of Paul found in Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”?

Pastor Martin Jones in Brea, California, found a way. Every woman in his congregation receives a rose on Mother’s Day, regardless of marital or reproductive status.

“I knew women who would not come to church on Mother’s Day because it was just too painful,” Jones said. “I also abolished our tradition of recognizing the youngest and oldest mother. The youngest was often an unmarried teenage girl.”

Another church in Colorado decided to turn Mother’s Day into a time for practical service. They offer free car repairs and handyman help for single moms that weekend.

Other pastors briefly acknowledge Mother’s Day in the worship service, but leave the celebrating for the children and husbands to do privately.

In honoring mothers, let us not forget the ones who are hurting. We can become the arms of Jesus, embracing his dearly loved daughters and helping them become whole.