

Pre-birth surgery saves lives of tiny twins

By Ruth Schenk | rschenk@secc.org

One-year-old twins Emma and Macey Stone chatter as they run through the great room of their family home in LaGrange, Ky. Everything they do reflects a miracle, said their proud parents, Dave and Dawn Stone.

Those who have watched the babies' journey agree. No one has forgotten the shock of hearing that one or both twins could die before birth, forget the day they received the call to pray through life-threatening surgery, or the close call that could have claimed both their lives in a few hours if Dave and Dawn hadn't made the right choice.

More than a year later, this family's deep sense of thanksgiving has not faded.

"This answer to prayer isn't something we thought we deserved," Dave said. "We're just grateful for this gift."

Dawn and David are not related to Southeast Senior Minister Dave Stone, but they've forged strong ties to the church. People seeking the Southeast senior minister in the phone book often call these Stones by mistake. Dave explains to those who call that he is not a minister and not the Dave Stone they're seeking, but he is a Christian. Sometimes callers go on to explain their needs, and he's prayed with several over the phone.

Dawn works as a dental assistant for Southeast member Charlie Vittitow, who was in the network of people who prayed for the babies.

Worries for the babies began on May 29, 2007, when Dawn was 20 weeks pregnant and went to the doctor for a routine ultrasound. The monitor showed twins, which was a dream come true for the couple. Twins ran in the family, and the couple loved the idea of adding two more children to their family, which included Michael, 15, and Kristen, 12.

But amid giddy joy of that news, the Stones sensed something was wrong by the way the technician's face changed as she studied the screen.

The doctor explained that the girls were connected by blood vessels in a rare condition called Twin to Twin Syndrome (TTTS), a serious complication that affects about 10 percent of identical twins. One twin receives all the nourishment from the placenta while the other starves. In the Stone twins, the baby they later named Emma Grace was the donor. All the nourishment passed from her through the blood vessels to the twin the Stones named Macey Faith.

But as the recipient of all the nourishment, Macey was also in danger. Along with the nourishment, Macey also received all the fluid, which forced her tiny heart to work four times as hard as it should.

Doctors believed the TTTS was mild to moderate and sent the Stones to a specialist that same day. They gave the couple four options: 1. They could do nothing. If they chose that option, the twins would have only a 15 percent chance of survival. Emma could starve to death, and Macey probably would also die because of the blood vessels they shared; 2. They could selectively abort Macey to save Emma. As pro-life Christians, the Stones told doctors that wasn't an option.; 3. Dawn could undergo amnioreduction to reduce the fluid surrounding Macey and relieve the pressure on her heart. Doctors actually drained the fluid, but it built up as fast as they removed it.; 4. They could try laser coagulation therapy, which was the most viable option. A specialist would use a laser to sever the blood vessels that tethered the girls



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAWN STONE

Hundreds who prayed for Macey and Emma Stone rejoiced in their safe arrival.

to one another. That had a 60 percent chance of success, but it also had risks. If the girls did not equally share the same placenta, they would lose Macey as well as Emma.

Dave said the only thing they could do in the face of the most difficult decision of their lives was to trust God. And sitting in the middle of fear of the unknown, they rested on the one thing they knew to be true—they would continue to trust God no matter what happened.

Many at Southeast as well as the couple's church, LaGrange Assembly of God, prayed for the doctors, the babies and the Stones. The Stone's other children sent out e-mails asking friends to pray for their baby sisters.

Doctors scheduled surgery on June 2, with a specialist in Cincinnati. The Stones had just crossed the Ohio River when Vittitow called to pray with them over the phone. Dawn said she couldn't even speak at that time, yet that call helped carry them through the trip.

All along, specialists warned that there was no way to predict how fast the TTTS would progress.

At the hospital, they found that it had advanced from mild to severe in just three days. If Dawn had waited just 24 more hours before undergoing the surgery, Macey could have died. She already had thickening of the heart muscle.

Sharing six blood vessels is considered to be a bad case of TTTS, and the Stone twins shared 23. Surgeons drained more than two liters of fluid from Macey and made microscopic holes in Emma's sac so amniotic fluid could flow to Emma. The girls equally shared the same placenta. Both girls survived, and Dawn spent the next six weeks in bed while the rest of the family cared for her and the house. Doctors had warned that neurological damage was possible, so everyone rejoiced when the twins were born with no medical issues on Sept. 3, 2007.

"We are thankful every day as we watch the girls grow," Dave said.