

# *The Parish: A Center for Hope and Healing*

**A** number of steps can be taken to create a parish atmosphere which (1) encourages women and men suffering from abortion to seek healing and reconciliation, (2) helps parishioners to be compassionate and supportive toward women who have experienced abortion and (3) creates a better understanding of the Church's whole message about abortion, which always encourages and supports reconciliation and healing after abortion.

## **A.** Homily Points

- ◆ Pray to the Holy Spirit before embarking on a homily about this subject, and be open to the promptings of the Spirit.
- ◆ Decide what in the readings of the day you will use as a touchstone to speak about God's love, forgiveness, mercy or other topic you want to highlight.
- ◆ Begin by asking those in the congregation who have had an experience of abortion to pray for you that you might speak the truth of their experience. Recognize that any discussion of abortion may stir deeply felt emotion. Today, almost everyone knows someone who has been affected by abortion. In addition to the mother, many other people may have been involved in the abortion. Invite them also to seek reconciliation and healing.
- ◆ Speak of the pain of women who have had abortions. Read sections of testimonies written by women from books such as *A Path to Hope*, *Catholic Women and Abortion* and *The Jericho Plan*. (See Resources section of this packet, page 25.) You may also know women who would allow you to use their testimonies anonymously.
  - ◆ Speak of the pain experienced by the fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends. Again, perhaps use testimonies from people you know.
  - ◆ Make the point that the truth of abortion is not discussed in public.
  - ◆ Move to God's compassionate and merciful love. Explain the Church's post-abortion outreach and the Holy Father's words to women who have had an abortion (*The Gospel of Life*, 99).

- ◆ Invite people to pray for those they know personally who have had abortions, or to adopt through prayer someone who has had an abortion and is in need of healing.
- ◆ Conclude with your focus point from the readings of the day. If someone leaves weeping when you talk about the aftermath of abortion in your homily, trust that God has touched her in a profound way and is calling her to healing. When you speak about this issue, you are telling people that the Church cares and that there is healing. This is a profound message for someone stuck in the pain of abortion.
- ◆ Bring up the subject of God's forgiveness, mentioning abortion, on holidays when extended families get together and even those who are non-practicing members attend Mass. People want to know it is safe to come home. They long to put their sin of abortion to rest.

*B.*

## The Parish Bulletin

The parish bulletin is probably the most underrated vehicle for promoting the message of God's love and mercy for women and men suffering from an abortion experience. Many women report having come to Project Rachel programs after learning of them in the parish bulletin. Said one woman who called Project Rachel: "When I saw it for the third time in my parish bulletin I decided you people were really serious about this." Nor is the woman who had the abortion the only beneficiary. Her sister, daughter or her friend also learns of the Church's care when they read that message.

### Sample Bulletin Announcements

- ◆ The pain and sorrow of past abortions need not endure for a life-time. Call Project Rachel for a confidential referral to a priest and/or counselor: Phone (area code and phone number). Trust in the mercy of God's love.
- ◆ Do you know someone who is carrying the grief and sorrow of past abortions? Share with them the "good news" of God's merciful love. Call Project Rachel for a confidential referral to a priest and/or counselor: (area code and phone number).
- ◆ A word from Pope John Paul II to women and men suffering because of abortion: "Do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation" (*The Gospel of Life*, 99). Call Project Rachel for a confidential referral to a priest and/or counselor: (area code and phone number).

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*After nearly 22 years, I can still hear that suction machine and the sobs of the other destroyed young women in the recovery room. I still have nightmares of dead babies. I still hate myself for allowing this to happen.*

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## Sample Bulletin Inserts

An insert in the bulletin provides an opportunity for fuller information about the Church's care for those involved in abortion. Some possibilities:

- ◆ The full text from *The Gospel of Life, 99* (reprinted on page 4 in this manual and in the clip art portion of the 1999 Respect Life Program packet).
- ◆ An anonymous letter from a parishioner (or another) explaining about his or her healing journey, which can help to allay others' fears and encourage them to seek reconciliation.
- ◆ A brochure describing post-abortion ministry (Project Rachel) available in your diocese.
- ◆ A message from the pastor that speaks about the painful aftermath of abortion and the availability of pastoral help and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

## C. Memorials to Children Who Died Before Birth

One way to foster the parish as a center of healing is by establishing memorials in remembrance of children who died before birth. A place of remembrance for parents who have experienced the death of a child before or at the time of birth can be a means of great consolation.

Since 1992 local Knights of Columbus councils have sponsored more than 1,700 memorials on Church properties throughout the country. Pictures of many of these can be found in the Order's magazine, *Columbia*, over the last several years. You may want to ask your local Council to consider undertaking such a project in your parish.

Some possibilities for memorials (though this is an area for great creativity):

- A garden area on the parish grounds
- A monument or a statue of the Blessed Mother in the parish cemetery or on the parish property
- A niche or corner in the church dedicated to the memory of these children
- A Room of Remembrance which provides a place of prayer and a Book of Remembrance for parents to write in the names of their children who died before or at birth
- A "Blanket of Love" memorial quilt (available through DeMarillac Center, (301) 447-1811)

*A prayer service for dedicating such memorials is available from the NCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities. It can also be found in the 1999 Respect Life Program packet.*