

# Hope and healing after abortion

'I didn't think the church cared or God cared about me.' - Alison

'I know my abortion has caused much self-hatred that was expressed in my eating disorder and many other problems.' - Anonymous

For many women and men, involvement with abortion has left a painful and lasting wound. Society tells them, "Get over it. It was nothing. Move on with your life." Yet the loss of a child, even through abortion, is the loss of a child. A grieving parent's heart needs to know hope, healing and forgiveness.

Noting a lack of help for such women, Theresa Karminski Burke, Ph.D., founded The Center for Post Abortion Healing in Pennsylvania in 1986.

In 1994, Dr. Burke published Rachel's Vineyard: A Psychological and Spiritual Journey for Post Abortion Healing. This was a unique support group model, offering a very concrete, emotional experience for women who were grieving the loss of their aborted children. A year later Dr. Burke adapted and expanded the curriculum into a format for weekend retreats. Soon individuals began to travel from other states to experience this very effective healing process.

"Many programs for post abortion healing are rooted in a Bible-study approach. Some women find it difficult to digest the word of God until their sense of unworthiness is improved," said Dr. Burke. Because of the emotional numbness and secrecy that often surrounds the termination of a pregnancy, conflicting feelings both during and after the event may go unrecognized and unspoken, thereby remaining unresolved.

The Rachel's Vineyard retreat weekend provides an opportunity for individuals to examine their abortion experience, identify the ways that the loss has impacted their lives, past and present, and helps them to acknowledge and process any unresolved feelings they are struggling with.

History of Rachel's Vineyard

Without a budget, office or advertising, Rachel's Vineyard became a national grassroots outreach. By word of mouth only, and due to its dramatic effectiveness, the retreats began to spread across the country; increasing from 18 retreats in 1999 to 35 retreats in 2000. Currently, Rachel's Vineyard has grown to 500 retreats annually, held in 47 states and 17 countries, with many new sites in development.

The Rachel's Vineyard weekends for healing after abortion are presently being offered by over 180 teams across the United States as well as Canada, Latin America, Africa and elsewhere.

Project Rachel Ministry in Baltimore is offering Rachel's Vineyard Retreats. The post-abortion ministry of the Archdiocese of Baltimore is registered with the National Rachel's Vineyard Office. The next scheduled retreat in Baltimore is May 18-20, with future retreat dates to be posted.

Each retreat must include one mental health professional (a pastoral counselor/therapist or psychologist) and clergy representative as part of the retreat team. All team members have participated on Rachel's Vineyard retreats and have continued in-services and training on post-abortion trauma.

The Rachel's Vineyard retreat process is, first and foremost, a journey of faith where one encounters the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

The retreat process incorporates "living Scripture" into the spiritual/psychological journey. It allows women and men to experience God's love but also his challenge by actively entering biblical stories and imagining themselves as women and men in scripture scenes speaking with the Lord. Participants are invited to actively participate in the expression of rituals, prayer and the Word. It is not passive, but challenging and dynamic.

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the numbers of women and men seeking help from abortion trauma continues to grow.

If you are hurting following an abortion, contact:

Project Rachel  
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Baltimore, MD 21201  
1-800-286-4224

Email: [projectrachel@archbalt.org](mailto:projectrachel@archbalt.org)

National Rachel's Vineyard Office  
1-877-HOPE-4-ME

This article is part of an ongoing series from the Archdiocesan Respect Life Committee, of which Denise Douglas is a member. A registered nurse, Ms. Douglas is also coordinator of Project Rachel.