

# **Men affected by abortion need healing, reconciliation, say speakers**

OAKBROOK, Ill. - For men suffering the aftermath of abortion, Thomas Mr. Golden offers a message of healing.

"We have to learn to love men. ... That is how we are going to reclaim fatherhood," he said.

Mr. Golden, author of "Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing," was a speaker at a conference on "Reclaiming Fatherhood" Sept. 8-9 in Oakbrook. He has been teaching mental health professionals around the world about men and boys and the way they heal from stress, grief and trauma.

The conference on how abortion affects men was the second such gathering sponsored by the Knights of Columbus and organized by the Milwaukee-based National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing. The first conference was held in November 2007 in San Francisco.

Co-sponsored by the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office for Evangelization, this year's event featured presentations by psychologists, a counselor and a sociologist. Several fathers who have lost a child to abortion also spoke.

For those from 36 states and four countries gathered in Oakbrook, the message was clear: Society must recognize the unique experience of men who have lost their fatherhood through abortion, and the ministries and resources available to guide the healing process must be made known.

Ministries offered by the Catholic Church and other faith traditions have been focused on supporting women who have had an abortion. Until recently, the grief and pain experienced by the men affected by abortion has not been as widely discussed.

Men are involved in an abortion decision in many ways, and the level of their involvement affects how much guilt they feel afterward, according to the speakers. Many men know about and fully support the decision, while others may not know until years later that they lost a child to abortion.

Conference speakers noted that in the 35 years since the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, more than 40 million abortions have been performed and at the same time there has been in general a lack of attention to those suffering from the decision, particularly men.

According to data presented by psychologist Vincent Rue, studies indicate that men involved in abortion are very likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder. Mr. Rue, director of the Institute for Pregnancy Loss in Jacksonville Fla., reports that 41 percent of men responding to an online survey about their abortion experience met the full diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder.

For men suffering from an abortion, the disorder is a haunting condition, he said. Men may be plagued by nightmares, become severely overprotective of their families and in extreme circumstances take their own lives.

Vicki Thorn, founder of Project Rachel, the Catholic Church's post-abortion healing ministry, called for a need to recognize the differences between men and women. "The first book ever written on men and abortion was in 1984. It has taken almost 25 years to actually get together to talk about the issue," she said.