

*Project Rachel is the church's ministry which operates as a network of professional clergy, licensed counselors and volunteers all trained to provide one-on-one spiritual and psychological support for those who are suffering from the trauma of abortion.*



- Nearly half of pregnancies among American women are unintended, and four in 10 of these are terminated by abortion. Twenty-two percent of all pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) end in abortion. *Facts On Induced Abortion in the United States*. <http://www.guttmacher.org>.
- 47% of abortions are repeat procedures. This repetition is closely related to unresolved abortion trauma. *Forbidden Grief*, by Theresa Burke with David Reardon. Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002.
- 70% of women choosing abortion believe that abortion is morally wrong. They are choosing against their consciences because of some pressure, from others or circumstances, which make them feel they have no other choice. *The Jericho Plan: Breaking Down the Walls Which Prevent Post-Abortion Healing*, by David C. Reardon. Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 1996.
- Men also suffer after their participation in an abortion with unresolved guilt, shame and grief and need to hear about the good news of healing in Project Rachel/Rachel's Vineyard.

If you or a friend is hurting from abortion, please contact us at 410-625-8491, 800-286-4224, or [projectrachel@archbalt.org](mailto:projectrachel@archbalt.org). Your contact will be treated with complete confidentiality.

## **The Journey from Grief to Grace: Reaching Out to Those Hurting After Abortion, Theresa Burke, Ph.D.**

Once a woman has made a decision to abort, it is a clear indication that her difficult challenges have resulted in absolute despair. In her desperation, she forgets that God has a plan for her life. Likewise, she cannot see that He also has a plan for the life of her child. We need to comprehend the magnitude of desperate circumstances that have fostered her profound and shattering desolation. These emotions do not go away after an abortion. They continue to intensify and swell, choking off her connection to herself, God, and to others.

As people of God who proclaim forgiveness, restoration, and renewal, we need to be aware of the numerous factors that compel the decision to abort a child: physical and emotional abandonment by the father, threats of violence, coercion, pressure and manipulation from others, fear, anxiety, and despair. Nestled tightly within the alluring grasp of a culture of death, she is offered the freedom to choose by the same welcoming arms that tempted Eve while Adam was nowhere to be found, let alone trying to protect her!

At first, it feels like empowerment and freedom, until the choice turns into an intimate weapon. She is embraced with instruments that scrape empty the tabernacle of her womb, resulting in the destruction of her child, created in the image of the very likeness and love of God. This reality becomes the genesis of a war, an internal battle of guilt, shame, secrecy, suffering, and self-contempt.

As we reach out to those who have suffered the loss of a child through abortion, it is important to understand the paradoxical tendency:

1. They want to bury abortion-related memories and run away from the feelings.
2. They have a desperate hunger to find an outlet for the pain, to find reconciliation, understanding, peace, and healing.

This creates a real dilemma for friends, family, and pastors who want to reach out to those hurting after abortion. The issue is so agonizing, there is a marked sensitivity to the subject. Most women and men “don’t want to go there”. Many cannot even say the word! Sometimes parents, boyfriends, husbands, counselors, and friends are usually part of the decision to abort, often encouraging or even forcing abortions. They too will be reluctant to listen to the suffering individual because of their own unresolved feelings of guilt, which are activated when their loved one is hurting. They will minimize their pain, telling them, “It’s time to move on”, and “You made the right decision”.

And so, those who are hurting shrink even deeper into themselves, funneling grief into private addictions and compulsions, eating disorders, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, promiscuity, anxiety, depression, acting out, and becoming workaholics to provide a shield against feeling their pain or to create a private fortress against future intimacy.

Post abortion trauma can affect anybody, especially teenagers. One study done by the University of Minnesota showed that teenagers are ten times more likely to attempt suicide if they have had an abortion in the last six months, than are teens that have not had an abortion.<sup>1</sup>

So where do we start? How can we reach out with love and hope to those wounded by abortion?

Educate yourself about the symptoms and life experiences of those wounded by abortion. . . .

Explore your own involvement in abortion. . .

Listen and acknowledge their pain. . . .

No judgments . . . .

Understand the fear. . . .

Encourage them by expressing God’s love for them. . . .

Help them to seek recovery. . . .

Keep their confidence and continue to be supportive. . . .

Pray for them and have peace. . . .

Be a light in the darkness. . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Garfinkel, et al., Stress, Depression and Suicide: A study of Adolescents in Minnesota, “Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1986).