

# Post-Abortion Healing

This outline is available for download at [www.RespectLifeMissouri.org](http://www.RespectLifeMissouri.org)

## Welcome & Opening Prayer for Life

Facilitator opens meeting with a “thank you” to all who have attended, introduction of new members, and a prayer. It is important that all participants feel welcomed and participate within their own comfort level.

## Opening Prayer: Prayer for Mercy

*My daughter, know that My Heart is mercy itself.  
From this sea of mercy, graces flow out upon the whole world.  
No soul that has approached Me has ever gone away unconsolated.  
All misery gets buried in the depths of My mercy,  
And every saving and sanctifying grace flows from this fountain...*

*...sooner would heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My mercy not embrace a trusting soul.*

*Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, 1777*

## 7:30 – 8:00 Presentation – *Post Abortion Healing*

**NOTE: The Powerpoint presentation is available online for download.**

- ❖ The presentation file has been updated into the same PDF format as this session outline so it should be just as easy to access. If no laptop/projector is available, a printout of individual slides can also be copied/printed and used as both a presentation and as a handout for participant notes.
- ❖ The content in the slide presentation is designed to be straight-forward but also to allow flexibility.
- ❖ The comprehensive nature of the written facilitator notes below has been provided to allow for diversity among groups, for an extended and on-going education, and for later reference on the topic. **Therefore, it is possible that all the content included in the facilitator notes will *not* be covered in a single session. Please review the information below for each slide and then create a presentation that is your own based on the needs of your particular group.**
- ❖ If necessary, the Respect Life Office can answer any questions or provide guidance on any topics in the slide deck. Please contact the Respect Life Office at (816) 756-1850 or [francis@diocesksj.org](mailto:francis@diocesksj.org) if you cannot access the on-line files.

**Slide 1 Introduction** Post-Abortion Healing

**Slide 2 Topics for Discussion**

- Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS) and other risks of abortion
- Impact of abortion on men, family, and friends
- Recognizing the signs and providing pastoral care
- Project Rachel and other post-abortive healing ministries
- God’s Mercy and the Church’s teaching on post abortion suffering

**Slide 3 Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS)**

*Post-Abortion Syndrome* is a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. The process of making an abortion choice, experiencing the procedure and living with the grief, pain and regret is certainly traumatic. As with any trauma, individuals often try to “forget” the ordeal and deny or ignore any pain that may result.

Many simply don't relate their distress to the abortion experience. At some point, however, memories resurface and the truth of this loss can no longer be denied. During these moments, the pain of post-abortion syndrome reveals itself in the hearts of millions of lives.

#### Slide 4 Risks of Abortion

Review the lists below and discuss a few of the most surprising ones...

##### Physical Risks Include:

- hemorrhage
- perforated uterus
- lacerated cervix
- torn bowel/intestine
- injuries to urinary tract
- infection and septic shock
- retained abortive tissue
- abdominal pain and cramping
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- spotting and bleeding
- complications from anesthesia
- masked ectopic pregnancy
- misdiagnosis of fetal age
- ignoring pre-existing conditions
- sexual assault
- hysterectomy
- heart failure
- embolism abscess
- coma
- incapacitation
- amputation
- aspirated vomitus
- hepatitis
- abortion when not pregnant
- unintended sterilization
- psychological injury

- future miscarriages
- breast cancer
- scarring or perforation of the uterine lining
- perforation of the uterus
- damage to other organs
- death

##### Emotional Risks include:

- preoccupation with becoming pregnant again
- depression
- eating disorders
- interruption of the bonding process with present and/or future children
- panic attacks
- low self-esteem
- repression and denial
- reoccurring nightmares
- difficulty with relationships
- alcohol/substance abuse
- inability to forgive self
- thoughts of suicide
- guilt
- psychological "numbing"
- anxiety
- anniversary sadness

#### Slide 5 Post Abortion Statistics

- The less severe and most common side effects may be experienced for up to 2 to 4 weeks after the procedure. These include abdominal pain and cramping, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, spotting and bleeding.
- Although the following occur much less frequent, they have the potential to cause long-term or permanent damage: heavy or persistent bleeding, infection or sepsis, damage to the cervix, scarring of the uterine lining, perforation of the uterus, damage to other organs, and death.
- The most serious complications occur in less than 1 to 100 first trimester abortions about 1 out of every 50 late term abortions.

The following is a long list of reported symptoms experienced by women after having an abortion. They don't all occur to every woman, and they occur at different 'times' in the post abortion period. Some women become distraught immediately, others are in a numbness period for a while, some are just vaguely uncomfortable until a friend or neighbor becomes pregnant, or until they marry 10 years in the future, and go to start their 'planned' family. So a woman who feels 'just fine' after her abortion at 17 may have a whole different view on it at 27, when she begins trying to conceive. Also the 'intenseness' of each symptom varies from woman to woman.

- Fear and avoidance of doctor's & dentist's offices, any type of medical building or situation. Fear of doctor's offices in general and any invasive medical procedure - they can cause extreme anxiety, nausea, sweating, panic attacks, and other problems. Things that trigger this are gyn exams, having blood drawn, dental or oral procedures, and tests involving hands or tubes or needles or anything put into your body.

- Feeling very 'protective' of your body, and not wanting anyone to touch you or come into your personal space for any reason.
- Feelings of sadness and crying when seeing babies or children or pregnant women
- Feelings of jealousy when seeing babies or children or pregnant women
- "Anniversary Date" problems. The Anniversary is usually one or more of the following:
  - The date the woman got pregnant
  - The date of the abortion procedure
  - The would be 'due date' of the baby, had the pregnancy not been interrupted.

Anniversary Date problems can be an unexplained lapse back into severe depression in the days before and after an Anniversary Date, illness on or around Anniversary Dates, accidents and injuries around Anniversary Dates, reoccurrence of any other regular PAS symptoms. Sometimes this can be unconscious - the woman doesn't think 'consciously' about an upcoming date being an "Anniversary", it's all subconscious, and just finds herself getting any of the above mentioned problems around an Anniversary Date year after year, with no other explanation for them. Even after healing, Anniversary Dates can still be problematic.

- Sleep Problems -- Having difficulty falling asleep, having difficulty staying asleep, sleep problems in general.
- Dreams and nightmares, including:
  - Either a baby in danger that you can't help, or yourself in danger; common 'threateners' are people with knives, or medical people.
  - Having a baby, or being with a baby, and people trying to take the baby away.
  - Having a baby, or being with a baby, and the baby is upset and won't look at you.
  - Having a baby, or being with a baby, and other people are telling you what you have to do with the baby (e.g. baby needs surgery that you don't want it to have)

These nightmares may occur frequently, nightly for some women, weekly for others, monthly or only on 'anniversaries' for others. These dreams can be quite upsetting, and can contribute to the sleep problems.

- 'Replacement Baby' feelings -- the strong urge to go out and get pregnant again, preferably with the same man, but 'keep' the baby this time. This urge is present, even when all the reasons or situations that influenced women to choose an abortion the first time are still in place. Unfortunately, for the women who do get pregnant again, many typically find that they actually feel worse about the abortion because they must come to terms with the fact that 'replacing' a baby is impossible.
- Intrusion or 'Flashbacks' -- the woman can involuntarily re-experience the abortion or events surrounding it - flashbacks to the clinic, to protestors, to the actual abortion procedure, and the hours afterwards.
- "Emotional constriction" or "numbing" - a need to avoid feelings, thoughts and situations reminiscent of the trauma, a loss of normal emotional responses or both. These feelings can seem unreal to the woman and the ordinary day to day business of life no longer matters. They feel cut off from the concerns of others and are unable to trust them. It may seem like the future holds nothing, and there's really no purpose for living. Alcohol, food and drugs can also be used as part of the 'numbing'.
- Anger -- Depending on the stage, the anger may be weak and hidden or it may be extremely intense and full-blown. The anger may be towards themselves, or toward the people they perceive as responsible for their abortion, or both.
- Guilt and Shame -- Women tend to feel guilt and shame about their abortion and they do not tell anyone about it, or talk to anyone about it, and will go to great lengths to prevent anyone from finding out about it, including lying to doctors, family and friends about having one.
- Isolating Themselves -- Women and men may experience shame at their own helplessness to 'get over this', and then become demoralized and isolated. They may withdraw from activities they used to enjoy and isolate themselves from friends and social situations. Isolating is very common, and also seems to come with depression.
- Sensitivity to pre-existing phobias -- If a woman had certain phobias before, such as fear of heights, fear of thunderstorms, or fear of bugs, those fears and phobias can become more severe.
- Eating disorders -- Anorexia and compulsive overeating both have been noted to start after an abortion where there was no history before. Women may be upset about what has transpired and wish to 'punish' themselves subconsciously for what they have done. Also, some women have reported a need to feel 'unattractive' in order to avoid the possibility of a relationship that could lead to a relationship and then another abortion. As a result, they find themselves either eating compulsively to swell themselves up and protect themselves from this problem, or to not eating at all.
- Easily startled and upset by loud noises that resemble the suction machine, such as vacuum cleaners, and blenders.
- Obsession with pictures of fetuses, similar to the need we feel to slow down to look at a car wreck -- you don't want to see it because you know it will horrify you but you "have" to see. At this stage, women become obsessed with what their fetus looked like, and search out pictures of a fetus that matches the age that theirs was, and stare at it, and imagine what it felt like when it was alive, and try to imagine if it heard or felt anything.

- Relationship problems -- Having problems with relationships with your partner, lots of anger or other emotions interfering in your daily life and relationship, being unable to discuss and resolve these problems, and relationship problems with anyone else who was around or influenced your decision to have an abortion.
- Difficulty Making Decisions -- Women have reported difficulty making decisions, being unwilling to make any decisions, being very upset by any changes such as moving, changing jobs. There is a panic that a 'wrong' decision might be made, and this can be a big problem. It can affect all kinds of daily small decisions, like what to have for dinner, what movie to watch. A sense of panic sets in, and the woman feels frozen and paralyzed.
- Emotional numbness with regards to current children -- Being unable to relate and bond properly with the ones that are here. Feeling like a 'bad mother', and feeling like the children would be better off without her interaction and influence.
- Overprotectiveness of current children -- An almost hysterical worry about current children, constant fears that something will happen to them, as 'punishment' for having the abortion. This can lead to parents not being willing to leave the child with any babysitters, being overprotective about their physical health, and the activities they do.
- Fears and overprotectiveness when pregnant again -- When a woman becomes pregnant after an abortion with a planned pregnancy, there can be a reoccurrence of nightmares, as well as constant fear and worry that something will 'go wrong' with this pregnancy, as punishment for the abortion. Fear of the baby dying, or having something wrong with it are common.
- Comparison of pregnancies and/or children -- Looking at pregnant women, babies, or children and comparing yourself to where you would be in the pregnancy, had you kept it, or the child to where 'your child' would be, if you had kept it. Looking at other children and thinking they look like what your child would have looked like.
- Viewing miscarriage or infertility as 'punishment' -- Feeling that future problems with infertility or miscarriages are 'punishment' for having had an abortion.
- Suicidal feelings -- Many women have problems for weeks, even months or years of struggling with suicidal feelings, feeling like they 'don't deserve' to be alive. Some women report the urge to 'find' the baby and apologize to it, hold it, etc.
- Triggers of smells and food -- Women have reported being unable to eat or of having a panic/nausea/anxiety attack at the smell of food they ate on the morning of the abortion or from what they were given in the recovery room afterwards.
- Being distressed at having a period, a reminder of the abortion -- Blood and cramps but no baby. Women with PAS seem to be very upset the first few times they have their period after an abortion.
- Anxiety problems -- Having problems with anxiety, worry and nervousness, with no visible cause. Anxiety can be treated with medication.

## Slide 6 Quotes from Women

Review the quotes on the slide and ask the group for thoughts and feedback.

Here are additional quotes that may be discussed...

- "As I look back at my post-abortion life, I realize that so many of the mistakes that I made and created or myself were due to the subconscious image I had created of myself, I had killed my own baby. How could anyone love me when I couldn't love myself?"
- I began to drink heavily and use drugs. I had severe depressions in which I contemplated suicide. I had, and still have, horrible nightmares involving babies and people trying to kill me. I still get depressed and cry a lot. I pray at night that God will let my baby know that I didn't kill him because I hated him. I long to hold him so much now that it hurts, and I want him to know that.
- I harbor secret fears that one of my children will be taken from me because of this horrible act that I have committed. This fear was compounded when I almost miscarried one of my children at twelve weeks. I feel sure the problem was connected to my abortion. The problems go on and on. I had never allowed myself to calculate the month that my baby would have been born. Recently I figured out when the baby would have been born and was horrified when I realized that it was within weeks of when both of my children were born. I had felt intense pressure from within myself to become pregnant at this particular time with both my children. And now the realization has hit me that subconsciously I have substituted my live children for my dead child, by conceiving and giving birth at the same times.
- "It is hard to explain this need to keep having babies, but I did. From 1976 with the birth of my first living child, to 1985 at the birth of my fourth and final living child, I was pregnant a total of eight times. With the birth of my last child the doctor didn't leave me any choice but to quit having children if I wanted to live to see the ones I had grow up.

- It is a constant struggle trying to overcome my guilt and depression, even knowing I have been forgiven. I dread the day when I have to come face to face with my little child and explain to her why mamma took her life. But I also think I am a softer, more caring person than I might have been. If not for the abortion, I might have turned out "pro-choice."

### Slide 7 Why Keep the Pain of Abortion Inside?

- Guilt and shame
- Grief that she cannot share
- Were pressured to have an abortion and are now left alone

By not acknowledging a traumatic abortion experience, a psychological barrier is erected and an emotional toxicity is perpetrated.

A woman may experience, coupled with denial and avoidance, numbing, amnesia, phobic responses and interpersonal distancing.

For this reason, elective abortion remains one of the most emotionally charged and politically sensitive topics worldwide.

For more information:

<http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/PDF/Articles/Abortion%20and%20Post%20Traumatic%20Stress%20Disorder%20-%20Theresa%20.pdf>

### Slide 8 Abortion's Impact on Men

Discuss with the group possible reason for each of these common psychological and behavioral reactions in fathers of aborted children:

- Rage or Anger
- Impairment of Masculine Self-Image
- Impotence
- Grave Concern for his partner's well-being
- Inability to communicate with partner about experiences
- Excessive alcohol or drug use
- Risk-taking behaviors
- Grieving and sadness
- Obsessive thoughts of the lost child
- Nightmares in which someone/something vulnerable is being threatened
- Desire for another child
- Suicidal thoughts
- Emotional abuse and/or spousal battering

### Slide 9 What Do Abortionists Say?

*"I've had patients who had abortions a year or two ago- women who did the best thing at the time for themselves- but it still bothers them. Many come in- some are just mute, some hostile, some burst out crying...There is no question in my mind that we are disturbing a life process. The trauma may sink into the unconscious and never surface in the woman's lifetime....But a psychological price is paid. It may be alienation; it may be pushing away from human warmth, perhaps a hardening of the maternal instinct. Something happens on the deeper levels of a woman's consciousness when she destroys a pregnancy. I know that as a psychiatrist."*

-Washington abortionist and psychiatrist Julius Fogel who has done over 20,000 abortions

### Slide 10 What Do the Pro-Aborts Say?

*"Post-abortion stress syndrome" — PASS or PAS — sounds scientific, but don't be fooled — it's a made-up term. Not recognized as an official syndrome or diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, or any other mainstream authority, it is a bogus affliction invented by the religious right."*

Ms. Magazine

*"Groups opposed to abortion claim there is a condition called "Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome" which they say is similar to post-traumatic stress disorder. This is not an actual psychological condition and is not recognized by the American Psychological Association."*

*National Abortion Federation*

...then why is it neither the "religious right" nor "groups opposed to abortion" that are speaking out the loudest about the real pain that women and men are feeling. If PAS is not real, then why are there so many individual women and men who have had abortions, with nothing themselves now to gain, so willing to speak out against abortion?

Science says PAS is not "real" but this simply means there are people today in the scientific community making objective assumptions based on the information that is available to them. As their "reality" changes, so do their scientific claims.

In this case, the American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association do not believe PAS is real because most of the data available to them, or at least the data they have chosen to review, examines only women who have recently aborted. The majority of PAS aftermath occurs months, even years after the abortion.

Another very real reason there is a lack of research done on PAS is that pro-choice advocates actively work to block governmental funding of these studies.

### **Slide 11 Victims of Abortion**

Abortion touches everyone.

### **Slide 12 Recognize the Signs of PAS**

Many of the symptoms discussed have been internal. Here is a reminder of some of the more outwardly-visible signs that someone may be struggling with a past decision to participate in an abortion.

### **Slide 13 "Don't Worry, You Did the Right Thing!"**

When the father of the child tries to be supportive by saying, *"It is up to you, I will support whatever you decide."* he actually contributes to the sense of loneliness and stress a woman feels.

Likewise, telling a loved one, *"You did the right thing."* or *"Don't feel bad, you will have children someday."* only adds to the pain. The physical and emotional and psychological pain is real and trying to invalidate this only makes the person feel more strongly that they are a bad person or that there is something wrong with them.

You would never tell someone, *"It really is for the best that you killed your toddler, you will always have more children."*

### **Slide 14 When a Friend Confides in You**

- Listen with your heart
- Assure her of your love and support
- Suggest where help can be found
- Provide spiritual healing
- Assure her of your friendship and promise to be there

### **Slide 15 Process of Healing**

Although post-abortion syndrome (PAS) can be a traumatic and painful process, it is also a natural response to a real loss.

The following is a commonly accepted list of the stages a person goes through during the healing process after a loss, especially after the loss of a child to abortion. Along with the list is a summary of some of the "symptoms" we have already discussed.

**NOTE: Unless the details below have not yet been discussed with the group, this information should only be used to demonstrate how PAS is a natural grieving process. Otherwise, you may spend a lot of time repeating information already covered earlier.**

#### Stage 1 - Denial, numbness, and apathy

- This stage can start before the abortion has even taken place! Many women, after coming to the extremely difficult choice to terminate a pregnancy, may enter Stage 1.
- Women have reported feeling a sense of 'disassociation' with the abortion plans, things like 'calling the clinic', or making other arrangements seem to have been done 'in a fog', like it was 'someone else' doing it.
- One woman reported that she told herself over and over again that she was NOT having an abortion, she was just having a 'procedure' done, and thought this way the whole time. She had a difficult time on the procedure table, but once it was over, went right back to the chant in her head "I did not have an abortion, I did not have an abortion." She never told anyone in her life that she had an abortion, she lied about it to doctors on medical histories, and basically 'forced' her mind to accept the thought that she had not had an abortion. This worked for 11 years for her, until something broke her wall of denial down, and she ended up having a nervous breakdown, and needing care at an inpatient facility, to deal with the immense amount of feelings that had been 'stuffed' for so long.
- Denial and numbness can go on for weeks or even years. Women can be having problems in their lives, and having problems with their health, but discount their abortion as the cause.
- Women can experience a wide range of emotional and physical problems after abortion such as: sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, alcohol abuse, drug (prescription and street) abuse, depression, relationship problems, low self esteem.

#### Stage 2 - Beginning awareness (feeling a bit sad or uncomfortable when thinking of the abortion)

- This stage is characterized by avoidance of babies, women who are pregnant, baby-related sections in stores, and avoidance of discussions of prolife/choice issues.
- The reason is not fully there in the woman's mind yet, but she knows that these things are bothering her, triggering her somehow, and she just stays away from them at every chance.
- Women can be edgy, irritable, easily startled, easily upset by triggering things and sounds (vacuum cleaners, or smells or other things that remind her of the abortion)

#### Stage 3 - Full awareness (being very upset about the abortion, but possibly still not "consciously" acknowledging the abortion as the cause of the problems)

- This stage begins with awareness of the reality of the abortion, followed by extreme sadness, depression and grief - also includes a desire to 'punish' oneself by viewing pictures of aborted fetuses, thinking of pain the fetus may have felt, obsessing over what happened, thinking of yourself as a 'murderer', punishing yourself with abuse of drugs or alcohol, not eating or eating too much.
- This is a very intense, very frightening stage. Women can be haunted or obsessed night and day, and can have recurring frightening nightmares. Women can sleep poorly, waking often during the night, have trouble falling asleep, and can also be easily startled.
- This can also be where the 'replacement baby' symptom shows, and the woman will start attempting to become pregnant again, almost desperately so, in order to replace the 'lost' baby - thinking if she gets pregnant again, that all her pain from the abortion will go away.
- Clinical depression is a common part of this stage, as well as major difficulty dealing with existing children, and any relationships.
- "Intrusion" is also a part of this stage, which means the woman can involuntarily re-experience the abortion or events surrounding it - flashbacks to the clinic, to protestors, to the actual abortion procedure, and the hours afterwards.
- When they are not suffering these 'reminders', PAS sufferers are subject to another set of symptoms, described as "emotional constriction" or "numbing" - a need to avoid feelings, thoughts and situations reminiscent of the trauma, a loss of normal emotional responses or both. Their feelings can seem "unreal" to them, and the ordinary day to day business of life no longer matters. They feel cut off from the concerns of others, and are unable to trust them. It seems like the future holds nothing, and there's really no purpose for living.
- At the same time they may feel hidden anger towards those responsible for their abortion, and may be experiencing shame at their own helplessness to 'get over this', and feel guilty about having the abortion. They become demoralized and isolated, and withdraw themselves from activities they used to enjoy, and isolate themselves from friendships, and social situations.

#### Stage 4 - Beginning anger (towards the man or the people involved)

- In this stage, women are still suffering from the symptoms and behaviors in Stage 3, but are now becoming more aware of anger.

- If certain people forced or coerced her abortion, or if she perceives certain people to be responsible for her abortion, anger at these people can begin to break through her numbness, and can cause her to have problems with her temper, explosiveness at little situations, yelling frequently, even throwing things - a sensitivity that is easily triggered, especially when in conflict with the people she perceives as 'responsible' for her abortion decision.
- This can make her life difficult, because her episodes of anger can now isolate the people who can recognize her actions, and who can help her seek treatment. The woman herself is not always capable of realizing why she is having this problem, and so does not always seek out treatment at this stage.
- Anger at 'herself' can also emerge at this stage, and she can begin or worsen self-destructive behaviors.
- Anger can emerge at seeing pregnant women, or hearing about pregnant women.
- Clinical depression can emerge in this stage as well. The feeling can surface that they would like to go back and 'not have' the abortion, but the abortion cannot be 'undone' and there is anger and depression associated with that thought.

#### Stage 5 – Either anger or severe depression

- Anger -- Lots of self destructive behaviors can emerge in the anger stage.
  - Drinking, illegal drugs, casual relationships, carelessness in activities of all sorts, disassociation emotionally from existing children and family, overeating, anorexia, bulimia and other self-harming practices like 'cutting'.
  - The woman can seem completely out of control temper-wise, emotions-wise, actions-wise.
  - Again the feeling can surface that they would like to go back and 'not have' the abortion, but the abortion cannot be 'undone' and there is anger and depression associated with that thought.
  - People may look at her actions, and label her as uncaring, or selfish, or just plain 'sick', without ever realizing what is driving her to act this way.
  - At this point, the woman is usually becoming 'tired' of whatever is pushing her underneath, but is unable to help herself stop - she still may not realize it is the abortion that is causing her to have these problems, and even if she does, she most likely doesn't know where to get help.
  - Intrusion may also be present in this stage.
  - Clinical depression can also emerge here.
  - This can also be the stage where women who are 'online' will go to 'Abortion Debate' message boards, and will express extreme anger towards other people, depending on their view. For example if the woman now feels prolife, she will express inappropriate anger and hatred towards any woman or man who is prochoice. Likewise if she is prochoice, she may express inappropriate anger and hatred towards women or men who are prolife.
- Depression -- Some women have a "depression Stage 5, where instead of feeling anger, and having self-destructive behaviors, they fall into complete and very deep depression.
  - They have difficulty getting out of bed, have difficulty performing normal daily self care, feel completely hopeless, express a wish to 'die' and 'join the baby', don't eat, or eat too much. They can see no point in the future, no hope in the future, and no reason to go on.
  - They can't function in their normal lives, and can even quit or get fired from their job, or school, and don't really care.
  - The black cloud of despair comes down on women in reverse 5 so strongly, that nothing matters anymore.
  - It is important that women with these symptoms seek professional help immediately, to help avoid suicidal ideations.

#### Stage 6 - Beginning resolution stage (dealing with what happened, dealing with your choices, etc.)

- At this stage, the woman has realized that she needs help resolving her feelings about the abortion, and has realized that her abortion has been causing problems for her.
- She now seeks out either a professional counselor, a psychiatrist or a woman's post-abortion support program.
- Sadness, fear, panic, and many of her PAS symptoms will still be with her, but hope may be dawning that she can finally find a way to deal with all this.

#### Stage 7 - Forgiveness stage (finding out how to forgive yourself, how to forgive the people with whom you are angry, naming and asking your baby for forgiveness, etc.)

- As the woman begins therapy, or begins a post-abortion support group, she begins to deal with all her feelings and issues about the abortion. She examines what happened to her, how it affected her life, and works on finding forgiveness for herself and the others involved.
- Anxiety may return at this stage.
- PAS symptoms may still be occurring.

- The longer she has waited from procedure date to officially seeking help, the harder recovery can be. There can be a period of wanting to 'withdraw' from all of it, and just try to go back to the way things were, and try to forget everything about the abortion. Healing, and all the things we must do and examine can be overwhelming, and retreat seems the better choice.
- Sometimes women do take 'escape breaks' from healing but usually Intrusion and PAS symptoms start again, and then they will return to the emotionally difficult task of healing.

Stage 8 - Beginning peace (starting to feel resolved with your personal feelings and losses, getting through the majority of the grief stage, etc.)

- As woman continue with their healing efforts, a light begins to break through the clouds. She starts to actually feel better, some of the grief, guilt and depression starts to lift.
- She begins to feel better about herself, and her role in the abortion.
- She begins to feel peace with the situation. The loss of the potential baby is still painful, and upsetting, but it is not as devastating as it was before.
- Seeing pregnant women does not evoke the same anger and jealousy that it did before. Her anger towards others starts to lessen.
- She can begin to see a future, and reasons for living, and she can see a definite lessening of her PAS symptoms and triggers.

Stage 9 - Full peace

- At this stage, women have totally forgiven themselves, the man involved and anyone else who they felt contributed to their abortion.
- They feel at peace with the loss of their potential child.
- They are able to listen to and discuss abortion issues without emotion taking over.
- Their PAS symptoms are gone, or are very mild. Their response to triggers is mild. They feel at peace with themselves, at peace about the abortion in general, and are functioning normally in their lives again.
- In any of the 9 stages, women can have a strengthening of their views about abortion, and can become strongly pro-choice, or strongly pro-life. Some women switch their view about abortion, after they have had one themselves. During the more difficult stages, women can become very vocal about their particular preference in this area. Once a woman gets to Stage 9, however, if she has strong views about abortion, she discusses them in more gentle and subtle ways.

#### **Slide 16 Project Rachel**

*"The process of healing from abortion isn't about who you are and what you've done; it is about who God is and what He's done."*

Thankfully, through Project Rachel – the Catholic Church's post-abortion healing ministry- women can find forgiveness and peace of heart through compassionate counseling and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Church offers reconciliation as well as spiritual and psychological care for those suffering from abortion's aftermath primarily through diocesan-based programs like Project Rachel. Such programs utilize specially trained priests and professional counselors who provide one-on-one care. Other post-abortion ministries that involve support groups and retreats are also available in many areas.

#### **Slide 17 Rachel's Vineyard – Retreats in KC**

Rachel's Vineyard is a safe place to renew, rebuild and redeem hearts broken by abortion. Weekend retreats offer post-abortive women and men a supportive, confidential and non-judgmental environment. It is a place where men and women who have been struggling with the anger, regret, are able to begin healing.

Each year in November, the diocese sponsors a Rachel's Vineyard retreat in the Kansas City area. This event is facilitated by local counselors and priests.

*Why do you think this retreat is held in November?*

- Summer is over and kids are back in school but planning for the holidays has not yet gotten underway so women and men have more time.
- The holidays are already a stressful time but they are especially difficult for women and men who have suffered an abortion since families typically get together and there are always a lot of kids running around and playing.
- Then comes January and the March for Life when everyone is talking about how terrible abortion is because of the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision back in 1973.

- Then there is February which can be gloomy outside and pretty uneventful except for a holiday right in the middle of the month when everyone is supposed to feel all warm and loving which is the opposite of how post-abortive women and men feel. As we have discussed, many know in their hearts that God still loves them but they do not feel worthy of love.

By having a retreat in November, there is a chance this negative cycle can be broken for good.

### Slide 18 Women Healed After Abortion

*"I'm not sure how to say thank you. I was finally able to feel whole. The Sacrament of Reconciliation was such a freeing moment for me...I am able to see God in my life, and that makes me smile. I feel worthy to be among God's people, and to be the best mother to my three children."*

*"Today, thanks to Project Rachel, I am a different person. To experience the power of forgiveness is something that I cannot put into words. I actually feel lighter. My shoulders are not hanging so low. The power of forgiveness is life-altering. I will always regret my decision, and I will continue to carry my quiet secret with me. It was become a part of who I am, but it no longer defines who I am."*

## Catechesis and Evangelization

### Slide 19 What Does the Church Say?

*In Ramah is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping!  
Rachel mourns her children, she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more.  
Thus says the Lord:  
Cease your cries of mourning, wipe the tears from your eyes.  
The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward...there is hope for your future.*

-Jeremiah 31:15-17

### Slide 20 What Does the Church Say?

*If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord.*

*With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.*

Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), no. 99 (1995)

The Church is aware of many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even chattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly.

### Slide 21 Role of Priests in Post-Abortion Healing

- Post-abortive women and men desperately desire healing and reconciliation with God.
  - Many times, women will first talk about their abortion in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is vital for priests to understand their pain and hurt while also being able to be an instrument of God's never ending love.
  - Often times these women have many questions as to if God will forgive them, or where their child is now. Priests need to be well-equipped to recognize and assist with the signs and symptoms of abortions.
  - However, there are also many people who do not talk to their priest about the pain they are feeling from abortion

*"I have never heard the topic discussed from the pulpit so I do not know what would happen if I confessed my abortion."*

*"I do not want to burden anyone else with my mistake."*

*"I have to see Father every week. I do not want him to know this about me."*

Every church-sponsored program and identifiably Catholic organization and agency should know where to refer those in need of post-abortion healing. Special resources to assist priests in this ministry are available from the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities and from many diocesan pro-life offices.

The Diocese Respect Life Office has sponsored Project Rachel workshops in the past and has resources available for priests. A few of the goals of the workshops are:

- Confirm the need within every parish for post-abortive healing
- Discuss the Project Rachel Program
- Create a team of pastors and priests who other pastors and priests can contact with questions and concerns or to whom pastors and priests can refer women and men suffering from abortions.

## Outreach Planning

### Slide 22 Create a Monument for the Unborn

Create a proposal for adding a Monument for the Unborn in each of the four Catholic cemeteries within the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph.

- What will it look like?
- Will it be a bench, an actual tombstone, a statue, or something else?
- Where in the cemetery will it be put?
- What are some ways we can fund the monuments?

***Send your ideas to the Diocese Respect Life Office.***

### Slide 23 Summary of Topics

- Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS) and other risks of abortion
- Impact of abortion on men, family, and friends
- Recognizing the signs and providing pastoral care
- Project Rachel and other post-abortive healing ministries
- God's Mercy and the Church's teaching on post abortion suffering

## Closing Prayer

### Slide 24 Prayer for Healing After Abortion

*Eternal Father,  
Source of all mercy and love,  
out of love for us you sent your Son,  
and willed that blood and water  
flow from his side to cleanse us of sin  
and restore lost innocence.*

*Hear the cry of each woman who mourns  
the loss of her child to abortion.  
Forgive her sin, restore her to your grace,  
and still the terror of her heart  
with a peace beyond all understanding.  
Through the intercession  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Mother of all tenderness and our Mother,  
strengthen her faith in you.  
Give her the consolation to believe  
that her child is now living in the Lord.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord,  
who conquered sin and death,  
and who lives and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever. Amen.*