

Caring for those who have  
lost unborn children

# Becoming the Good Samaritan?

But a Samaritan, as he travelled,  
came where the man was;  
And when he saw him, he took pity on him,  
He went to him and bandaged his wounds,  
pouring on oil and wine.

LUKE 10:33-34



## RESPECT LIFE

Healing the wounds of miscarriage and abortion

### *The death of any child is difficult, including those lost before birth.*

When a child dies after birth, friends and family gather to support the parents, to grieve and to pray. Those who lose unborn children can also feel a deep sense of loss. Sometimes few others are even aware that the lost pregnancy ever existed. Parents who lose unborn children may feel that no one understands them because they are expected to “get over it” and “get on with their lives.”

In this special Year of Grace how might we reach out to all those all around us who have lost a child before birth and may be grieving alone? How might we help them to find healing and hope?

### MISCARRIAGE

Karen Edmisten lost her baby at 15 weeks and says she fell apart, sobbing ‘I didn’t know how to act.’ In a new book *After Miscarriage*, Edmisten and others share their experiences, hoping to help others.<sup>1</sup> One mother writes, ‘I wish I could explain to my friends how this feels. My miscarriage ... my losses ... have been the most profound experiences of my life. I have never felt anything like this before. I know myself as “normal,” and I know myself in grief ... and I cannot really say that I am the same person.’<sup>2</sup> Edmisten explains that:

*When we are mourning we don't always want words. We know that no list of facts or level of wisdom will lessen our pain. There's no solution to the loss ... All we really want is a friend who will sit with us and let us be what we are: sad. Let us feel what we're feeling: pain. Let us do what we need to do: cry. We*

*want to get beyond the pain and discomfort and move on. But before we can genuinely heal, we have to slog through some misery.*<sup>3</sup>

It is not just mothers who feel the loss of their unborn child. As one father writes, ‘the half-truth we are never told but somehow pick up on is that miscarriage is not a man’s issue. The truth is that men and women suffer the loss in different ways. The falsehood is that men are removed from suffering.’<sup>4</sup> Parents who are feeling heartbroken after a miscarriage need to grieve. No matter the age or stage of development of the child, or whether they have had a chance to hold the child in their arms, parents do remember and grieve for their lost children. Edmisten has been involved in establishing Hannah Ministry to help support others through their grief. She says that our children deserve the dignity of our mourning, the recognition of their infinite worth and the respect that is manifest in our grieving their passing.<sup>5</sup>

### WOMEN AND ABORTION

Parents of aborted babies are not typically given permission to grieve.<sup>6</sup> The one in three Australian women who have lost a child to abortion are often left to cope alone.<sup>7</sup> They have been offered abortion as a “quick solution” that allows them to “get on with their lives.”

The issue of abortion often makes people uncomfortable. Someone close to us may have been involved in an abortion – perhaps a friend or family member – and this can make it difficult to discuss it openly. Many women are surprised to find that abortion is far from the “quick solution” that they had been promised. Melinda Tankard-Reist’s book *Giving Sorrow Words* gives us some powerful insights into women’s experience of grief.<sup>8</sup> Researchers report that 10-30% of women suffer from severe negative psychological complications after abortion.<sup>9</sup>

As Joanne Angelo M.D., Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry Tufts University Boston, who has been involved in Project Rachel and in treating women affected by abortion in the US, explains:

*The mother is expected to feel relief that her problem is over and “get on with her life.” ... Ordinarily, grief after an elective abortion is uniquely poignant because it is largely hidden. There most often are no provisions made to assist the parents of aborted children in their grieving – they have no child to hold, no photographs, no wake or funeral, and no grave to visit. A post-abortion woman typically finds herself alone to cope not only with the loss of the child she will never know, but also with her personal responsibility for her child’s death with its ensuing guilt and shame. As time passes ... her grief often becomes overwhelming.*

*Waves of unexpected emotion – sorrow, emptiness, guilt, depression, anger, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts – may flood her consciousness on the date the child would have been born each year, ... Mother’s Day, ... at the birth of another baby, ... seeing a child the age her child would have been ...*

*She may have great difficulty trusting persons like those who advised her abortion ... If she enters marriage without revealing her dark secret, her husband may never understand her mood swings, her difficulty with intimacy, her ambivalent relationship with subsequent children, or her attempts to deal with insomnia and recurrent nightmares with alcohol, prescribed medication, or illicit drugs.<sup>10</sup>*

For more information on women and abortion see the brochure *Healing the Broken Hearted* Respect Life Sunday 2006 (see weblink on back page).



### MEN AND ABORTION

We are often told “abortion is a women’s issue.” Yet clearly pregnancy involves both a man and a woman. If people think about the role men play in an abortion decision, they could think of the stereotype of a man who abandons his girlfriend or who forces an abortion on the mother of his child. The situation can be more complicated than this. Whichever role he played, abortion can have a deep long lasting impact on a man.<sup>11</sup>

Men have been socialised to believe that abortion is a woman’s decision. The slogan “it is her body and her choice” can serve to silence a father at the very moment his support is most needed. If he tries to be supportive of “whatever she decides”, she may read his noncommittal attitude as “he does not care about me, or about our baby ... he is not going to support me.” Alternatively, if he tries to support his partner by encouraging her to keep their unborn child, he may be accused of putting pressure on her. He might feel like he cannot win either way. He may suppress his own thoughts and feelings in trying to support his partner. Their lack of communication can lead to her going ahead with the abortion.

Vincent Rue, psychotherapist and Director of the Institute for Pregnancy Loss explains, ‘one of the sad realities of abortion is how caring men, who try not to hurt the women they love, in fact hurt them by saying nothing when abortion is first mentioned in the crisis decision making process. These men may be swept aside after the abortion by a fierce, often denied undercurrent of resentment stemming from their partner’s feelings of abandonment.’<sup>12</sup> Tragically, they may have kept their child if they had been able to discuss their true thoughts and feelings in time. There is a high rate of relationship breakdown after an abortion.<sup>13</sup>

Yet men do remember and grieve for their lost children. Their stories rarely make it into the public domain. Nevertheless we are recognising that they too need to share their experiences. Some are surprised at their feelings, are not sure how to make sense of them and can struggle with them for years.

Thirty years after losing his first child, Australian author Peter Carey wrote about his

experience in the *New York Times*. ‘Lately when I think of my children I have begun to remember not just the four-year-old, who is rattling on my doorknob as I write, or the eight-year-old but those other children I have spent a long time trying to forget.’ Carey’s girlfriend had an illegal abortion in 1961. She went on to give birth to three children born prematurely. Carey writes of his grief at losing these children soon after birth. Many years later he wishes ‘that we had honoured those children with a plaque, a name. I will always wish that forever.’<sup>14</sup>

Writing in *The Weekend Australian*, Alan Close reflected on his lost chance at fatherhood and that he is ‘the father of several terminations.’ He writes of struggling to watch others with their children.<sup>15</sup> Sam de Brito writes about his experience in his blog for the *Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>16</sup>,

*I should have two children; one of them would be turning 17 this year, the other should be 11 years old ... If you’re a man and your partner conceives but decides to terminate, a lot of the time that’s where the conversation ends; it’s her body, so it’s her decision ... Having been brought up to believe that it is a woman’s choice, that I had no right to tell her what to do with her body, I kind of slept-walked through the process: helped with the costs, drove the girls to and from the appointments and was as supportive as I could be ... As the years have passed since my decisions, a kind of phantom history has spooled out behind my two kids: birthday parties that never happened, schools they didn’t attend, fun they never got to have ... I can’t tell you how many times I’ve wondered what they would have been like. The more I’ve thought about it, the more unsettled I’ve become about the flippancy with which I made the decisions ...<sup>17</sup>*

William Zimmerman writes that,

*... nothing could prepare me for the devastating experience of losing a child and the emotions I would encounter in the aftermath ... There was only one thing that I knew I could do as a way to survive mentally and emotionally ... that was to write.<sup>18</sup>*

Over a period of 10 years William wrote a journal of his thoughts to his unborn child, which he has since published.

Sometimes an abortion can have further tragic consequences. Joanne Angelo reports the suicide of a young man following his teenage girlfriend’s abortion (due to parental pressure). He was distraught as he had recently lost his beloved father and the multiple losses were more than he could bear.<sup>19</sup> Increasingly, those working to help heal women after abortion are realising that men too grieve the loss of their children. As Vincent Rue explains, ‘for men and women alike, the feeling of emptiness may last a lifetime, for parents are parents forever, even of a dead child.’<sup>20</sup>

‘Men who have tried to prevent their partner’s abortion and found they have no legal right to protect their unborn child feel emasculated and stripped of their protective and nurturing role as fathers. Men who insisted on the abortion, paid for it, or did nothing to dissuade their partner from engaging an abortionist to kill their child, may become overwhelmed by guilt, shame



and self-loathing. Both groups of men often become angry, anxious, distrustful of women, abuse alcohol and drugs, and despair of ever being the husbands and fathers they had hoped to be.<sup>21</sup> There is some evidence that four in ten men experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, often around 15 years after the abortion.<sup>22</sup>

## MEN AND RELATIONSHIPS

Instead of being a quick solution, 'abortion can unwittingly lead many – both men and women – into a harrowing and complex psychological journey of depression, anxiety, and other emotional disturbances that often lead to a series of broken relationships.<sup>23</sup> When society doesn't encourage them to grieve, their bitter tears are shed alone and can be self-destructive.<sup>24</sup> They need to know that help is available for them. Often God is drawing them towards him but they are also afraid of being judged.

## THE MERCY OF GOD

Theologian Professor Jean Laffitte points out there are some who view a woman or man involved in an abortion 'as an unforgivable sinner, a person not entitled to the compassion and mercy of God or man.'<sup>25</sup> Church teaching on this is clear. Abortion is a 'grave matter.'<sup>26</sup> However, we are called 'to distinguish the sin from the sinner, to reject the sin, but not the sinner.'<sup>27</sup> Pope John XXIII said:

*It is always perfectly justifiable to distinguish between error as such and the person who falls into error ... A man who has fallen into error does not cease to be a man. He never forfeits his personal dignity; and that is something that must always be taken into account. Besides, there exists in man's very nature an undying capacity to ... seek the road to truth. God in His great providence is ever present with His aid. Today, maybe, a man lacks faith and turns aside into error; tomorrow, perhaps, illuminated by God's light, he may indeed embrace the truth.<sup>28</sup>*

'The Church feels the need and duty to intervene on abortion at this point in time and to do so according to the merciful example of God'<sup>29</sup> The Church has always raised her prophetic voice on the question of human life



and human dignity. As theologian Professor Livio Melina says, 'now more than ever, on the question of the deep emotional trauma brought about by abortion ... we see that her prophetic voice is being matched by her concern for those who carry this sorrow.'<sup>30</sup> There is a growing awareness that 'personal, relational, and societal effects of abortion ... have brought us to a point where something must be done.'<sup>31</sup>

## BECOMING MORE LIKE THE GOOD SAMARITAN

How might we go about reaching out to those affected by abortion, in our parishes, schools, families, and work places, who might still be grieving for lost children? How might we become bearers of grace in this special Year of Grace?

Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II call us to adopt the attitude of the Good Samaritan. Pope Benedict XVI insists that the Christian's program – the program of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), the program of Jesus – is 'a heart which sees' where love is needed and acts accordingly.<sup>32</sup>

John Paul II explained that 'our support and promotion of human life must be accomplished through the service of charity ... This is a particularly pressing need at the present time ...'<sup>33</sup> Pope Benedict XVI says that love –

*caritas* – will always prove necessary, as many people we encounter will be suffering from isolation, and a sense of not being loved, and a lack of solidarity.<sup>34</sup> Pope Benedict, addressing an international congress on abortion, *Oil on the Wounds*, said:

*Yes, the men and women of our day sometimes truly find themselves stripped and wounded on the wayside of the routes we take, often without anyone listening to their cry for help or attending to them to alleviate and heal their suffering ... Only by assuming an attitude of merciful love is it possible to approach in order to bring help and enable victims to pick themselves up and resume their journey through life ...*

*The Church's first duty is to approach these people with love and consideration, with caring and motherly attention, to proclaim the merciful closeness of God in Jesus Christ. Indeed ... it is he who is the true Good Samaritan, who has made himself close to us, who pours oil and wine on our wounds and takes us to the inn, the Church, where he has us treated, entrusting us to her ministers and personally paying in advance for our recovery.*

*Yes, the Gospel of love and life is also always the Gospel of mercy, which is addressed to the actual person and sinner that we are, to help us up after any fall and to recover from any injury ...'<sup>35</sup>*

## PRECIOUS ANGELS MEMORIAL GARDEN



After discussion with families who have lost children, St Therese's parish in Essendon has established a Precious Angels Memorial Garden. They hope it will enhance their "sacred space" providing families who have lost children – born and unborn – with a place to pray, remember, grieve and find hope. Some parents might find it helpful to have a memorial Mass celebrated for their unborn child(ren) and parishes are encouraged to include prayers for unborn children and their parents, especially around Respect Life Sunday, All Soul's Day, Christmas, and Mother's and Father's Day.

**St Therese's Parish Essendon, Garden of the Angels**  
Phone: (03) 9379 2039. Website: [www.saintthereses.com](http://www.saintthereses.com)

The parishes of St Jude and St Thomas More have similar memorials. For further information or to list other memorials please contact the LMF Office. Open Doors, Ringwood holds memorial services a few times each year for any pregnancy loss. Other shrines for unborn children include:

**National Memorial for the Unborn**  
[www.memorialfortheunborn.org](http://www.memorialfortheunborn.org)

**Shrine of the Holy Innocents, New York**  
[www.innocents.com/shrine.asp](http://www.innocents.com/shrine.asp)

This is a beautiful image for us to keep in mind. Livio Melina explains this parable further, saying that it is humanity which lies at the edge of the road, stripped and wounded by sin, incapable of reaching the goal. It is Jesus who cures us, 'paying in person ... brings [us] to the inn which is the Church ...'<sup>36</sup> He says,

*In our present day – indeed, perhaps now more than ever, the Church is called to be the “inn” we hear about in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a place where the wounded can be brought back to health ... Those who have suffered ... the trauma of abortion should experience the healing mercy of God in the embrace of the Church.<sup>37</sup>*

In the Year of Grace, 'the Church feels called to make her own the attitude of Jesus and the

Good Samaritan. She feels, along with many men and women of good will, the call to approach the individuals who are suffering, to descend from her horse, and to stoop to cure their wounds.'<sup>38</sup> Just as the Good Samaritan, 'saw him, and was moved with compassion, he went to him and bandaged his wounds,' so must we.<sup>39</sup> The Samaritan sees the suffering person, and without demanding to know the cause of the suffering, bends down to offer comfort.<sup>40</sup>

As we make our way along paths of life, we are called to become bearers of grace. We are called to develop the attitude of the Good Samaritan, an attitude of mercy, of 'a love which does not condemn,' but brings joy and hope.<sup>41</sup> We are called to welcome and console, to bring the healing power of Jesus to those who have

suffered, and to show them that their tears are not in vain, that their suffering can have a purpose and a meaning. Their sorrow can be healed. Those who have lived through the experience of abortion are able to help others experience the healing mercy of God.<sup>42</sup> 'And in doing so they witness to the legacy and memory of John Paul II, who showed us so many years ago – both through his teaching and example – that “suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilisation into a civilisation of love.”'<sup>43</sup>

*We pray that we might move one step closer to that new civilisation in this Year of Grace.*

## RESOURCES

### Miscarriage

Karen Edmisten, *After Miscarriage: A Catholic Woman's Companion to Healing and Hope* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2012).

#### Elizabeth Ministry International

[www.elizabethministry.com/Miscarriage\\_Child\\_Loss](http://www.elizabethministry.com/Miscarriage_Child_Loss)

### Men and Abortion



#### Forgotten Fathers: Men and Abortion Trauma, Abortion Grief Australia

Brochure:

[www.abortiongrief.asn.au/documents/men-and-abortion-trauma.pdf](http://www.abortiongrief.asn.au/documents/men-and-abortion-trauma.pdf)



#### Men and Abortion: Finding Healing, Restoring Hope, Knights of Columbus

Booklet:

[www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis334.pdf](http://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis334.pdf)



**Reclaiming Fatherhood.** General information on men and abortion. [www.menandabortion.info](http://www.menandabortion.info)

**Men and Abortion.** General information on men and abortion. [www.menandabortion.net](http://www.menandabortion.net)

Catherine T. Coyle, *Men and Abortion: A Path To Healing* (Toronto: Life Cycle Books, 1999).

### Women and Abortion

#### LMF Office Brochure: Healing the Broken Hearted Respect Life Sunday 2006

[www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily/Culture-of-Life/Respect-Life-Sunday-Resources/Healing-the-Broken-Hearted-2006.aspx](http://www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily/Culture-of-Life/Respect-Life-Sunday-Resources/Healing-the-Broken-Hearted-2006.aspx)

**Project Rachel.** Catholic healing ministry to those involved in abortion. [www.hopeafterabortion.com](http://www.hopeafterabortion.com)

## Prayer for Life

Heavenly Father,

In this Year of Grace,

we pray that we might become more like the Good Samaritan, so that we might have a heart that sees where love is needed, and reach out to help all those carrying a secret sadness.

We pray for all those grieving for their lost children, Help us to comfort them and bring them hope. Amen.

### Organisations offering support for parents:

**SANDS Victoria: Miscarriage, Stillborn & Newborn Death support**  
Phone: (03) 9899 0218 [www.sandsvic.org.au](http://www.sandsvic.org.au)

#### Open Doors Ringwood

Open Doors offers support to parents after miscarriage and abortion. Phone: (03) 9870 7044 or 1800 647 995 [www.opendoors.com.au](http://www.opendoors.com.au)

#### CatholicCare Melbourne

CatholicCare offers support to parents after miscarriage and abortion. Phone: (03) 9287 5555 [www.ccam.org.au](http://www.ccam.org.au)

#### Rachel's Vineyard Melbourne

Rachel's Vineyard offer retreats for parents after abortion. Contact: [anne@opendoors.com.au](mailto:anne@opendoors.com.au) or (03) 9870 7044 or 1800 647 995

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w: [www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily](http://www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily)

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AND OTHER  
RESOURCES



## Endnotes

- Karen Edmisten, *After Miscarriage: A Catholic Woman's Companion to Healing and Hope* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2012) p1-2
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- ibid. p4
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- Melinda Tankard Reist, *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories Of Grief After Abortion*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000). Abortion providers now list post-abortion grief as a possible consequence.
- Vincent Rue, "The Hollow Men: Male Grief And Trauma Following Abortion," *Respect Life Program 2008*, (Washington, D.C.: Secretariat Of Pro-Life Activities, 2008), also Selena Ewing, *Women and Abortion: An Evidence Based Review*, (Australia: Women's Forum Australia, 2005) [www.womensforumaustralia.org](http://www.womensforumaustralia.org)
- op. cit. Joanne Angelo p194
- Project Rachel Ministry: A Post-Abortion Resource Manual for Priests and Project Rachel Leaders, *Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations, Committee for Pro-Life Activities*, (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009) p27

- op. cit. Vincent Rue, "The Hollow Men"
- Catherine T. Coyle, *Men And Abortion: A Path To Healing* (Toronto: Life Cycle Books, 1999) p121 also see Elizabeth Ring Cassidy and Ian Gentles, *Women's Health After Abortion: The Medical And Psychological Evidence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Toronto: de Veber Institute, 2003) p217, Vincent Rue, "The Psychological Realities Of Induced Abortion," chap. in *Post-Abortion Aftermath* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994) p25, Shostak and McLouth, *Men and Abortion: Lessons, Losses and Love*. New York: Prager: 1984; p152
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- Sam de Brito, "Confessions Of An Abortioneer," *The Sydney Morning Herald Blog: All Men Are Liars* (Sydney), November 14, 2006 [http://blogs.smh.com.au/lifestyle/allmenareliars/archives/2006/11/confessions\\_of\\_1.html](http://blogs.smh.com.au/lifestyle/allmenareliars/archives/2006/11/confessions_of_1.html)
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- Jean Laffitte, "To Act According To The Merciful Example Of God," chap. in *Oil On The Wounds* (New York: Square One, 2011), p213-4. And *Gaudium et Spes*, no51 and John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) no62
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- op. cit. Livio Melina and Carl A. Anderson p2
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- Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) 2005, (St Paul's: Sydney) no31b and Carl A. Anderson, *A Civilization of Love: What Every Catholic Can Do to Transform the World* (New York: Harper One, 2008) p164, also see Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to the Participants at the International Congress" in Livio Melina and Carl Anderson (eds), *Oil on the Wounds* (New York: Square One Publishers, 2011) pxi. Also see [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080405\\_istituto\\_gpui\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080405_istituto_gpui_en.html)
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