

Press Release 2.10.11

Rachel's Vineyard Ministries Australian National Conference and One Day Workshop – March 2012.

Grief and Loss – A Ministry of Accompaniment

Rachel's Vineyard Retreats is a ministry to people who suffer pain and trauma after an abortion. This ministry has been offering retreats in Sydney for 10 years. Dr Theresa Burke began Rachel's Vineyard Ministries in 1994 after realising that people with post abortion stress have a great need for the spiritual and psychological healing. She realised that the pain is often unresolved grief and loss which is sometimes unacknowledged or denied in women and men who have been through an abortion experience.

The main work of this ministry is a retreat that uses prayer and scripture to assist women and men to grieve the baby they lost. Rachel's Vineyard Retreat is now the largest post abortion ministry in the world being run in 35 countries and 5 languages. The retreat is primarily for spiritual healing but is based in sound grief psychology.

The 4th National Conference will take place in Sydney on March 9-11, 2012 at Mt St Benedict Centre, Pennant Hills. The conference will include training in Grief and Loss ministry, sharing of stories both in post abortion experience and in support of those grieving, and talks and workshops by experienced practitioners in this field. Bishop Walker will celebrate the conference Mass on Saturday evening before the conference dinner.

There will be a one day workshop on grief and loss during the conference. This workshop will benefit spiritual directors, chaplains, counsellors, priests and anyone in pastoral care or bereavement counselling. Richard White, bereavement counsellor with WN Bull funerals, will conduct this workshop which can be taken independently of the conference.

The theme of the conference and workshop is "*You are the light of the world*" (Matt 5:14) because everyone in this ministry can bring the light of Christ's love to those in this pain. The conference will assist anyone working in post abortion healing to have a better sense of how the Christian message can assist those who in their grief and loss feel shame after an abortion experience. Many women and men feel they are alone, alienated from the church and God and no one seems to be able to talk about their grief. While they may have spoken to a priest or friend or been to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they often feel they have not been able to deal with the deeper pain of grief. There is no funeral, ritual or wider community support for their grief and this can have devastating effects.

Richard White will explore the model of accompaniment as a way to walk with people who grieve. He will discuss how people can cope, survive and even thrive; what happens when grief is denied; what to say and what not to say and self-care for those in this ministry.

Pope John Paul II, in the *The Gospel of Life* (No. 99), noted "I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. ...do not lose hope." It is with this sense of compassion and understanding that Rachel's Vineyard retreat ministry brings hope of healing to those in grief.

The retreats are now run in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane, Perth, Canberra and New Zealand. You can see full details of these retreats, the conference and workshop on the Rachel website:
www.rachelsvineyard.org.au

See Retreat Participant's Story below.

Picture attached: Theresa Burke, Founder Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Ministries

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Genevieve's Story (Not her real name. 362 words)

At the age of 16, I was pursued by a 23 year old man who lived nearby. I was flattered by his attentions and within a few months I was pregnant. Terror..... Panic Who could I turn to?

I tried to talk to my mother but her attitude had always been that "girls who get into trouble are BAD and you don't have anything to do with them or people will think you are like them".

I wanted to get married so I could have my baby, but my boyfriend refused to even discuss that option. He kept pressuring me to abort the baby and I was so terrified I just caved in. By this time I would have been about 8 weeks pregnant.

The abortion itself was a horrific experience, performed without anaesthetic. About half an hour later I was outside again; the sun was shining; the birds were singing; and I thought: "It's over..... it's all over....." and I went home to my family and pretended that nothing remarkable had happened that day.

After the abortion I felt numb. I felt as though I was completely worthless and it didn't matter what happened to me from here on because I was dead inside. For the next 40 years I pushed down the grief and the loss and horror I felt and refused to let it come to the surface.

Two years after finding a brochure on Rachel's Vineyard's Retreat, I heard about healing retreats being offered in the United States so I attended a Rachel's Vineyard Healing Retreat, almost 45 years after the abortion.

The healing I found on that weekend was very profound.

There are hundreds of thousands of women and men in Australia who have had to remain silent, with their shame and pain locked away deep inside.

Through the healing power of God I have been given back my voice after so many years of shame-filled silence and now I can speak from my own experience about the horror of abortion, how destructive it is, and how its pain lasts a lifetime unless there is pastoral, spiritual and expert help to process all that has happened.