



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Ministries address trauma of abortion, diocesan leadership hears at annual Administration Day, Sept. 9 2009

BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

Two ministries related to the trauma caused by abortion were described to parish and diocesan representatives Sept. 9 in one of several presentations at an annual diocesan Administration Day in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon.

Anita Sonntag provided information about Rachel's Vineyard Ministries, which provides weekend retreats to those struggling with the emotional and spiritual pain of abortion. She also described the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, which involves women speaking out about the damage that having an abortion has caused in their lives.

"These are non-profit organizations run by volunteers, most of whom are post-abortive women who have experienced forgiveness and healing, and I am one of those," said Sonntag.

"It is simply impossible to rip a child from a mother's womb, without it tearing out a part of the woman herself," said Sonntag. "Yet pro-abortion groups and our laws, or lack thereof, tell women that it is no big deal, and that it's our legal right, and many women buy into the belief that anything that is legal is also morally right."

However evidence shows that the majority of women who have abortions do not freely choose to do so, but experience coercion, force or threats; and often feel they have no other choice, she said, likening the situation to an animal caught in a trap that gnaws off its own leg.

"Studies show that 70 percent of women who have abortions believe it is morally wrong. They act against their consciences because they feel trapped by the situation," she said. "At the time it seems like the easy way out and the only way out."

But after the abortion, many women suffer from post-abortion syndrome, which is a type of posttraumatic stress disorder, Sonntag related. "In a process of denial, the woman blocks out the natural grieving process in the death of a child, and often denies responsibility for the

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abortion. The denial and suppression blocks the healing process and the possibility of forgiveness for herself and others,” she said. The trauma will often manifest itself in a breakdown of function in psychological, physical and spiritual areas, with the pain and guilt sometimes remaining unspoken and unrecognized for many years.

Sonntag described her own painful journey after an abortion. “It took me almost 40 years to understand the source of the psychological problems that had plagued me since the time I had the abortion,” she said. “The event was like an abscess eating away at me even when I denied it.”

She found God’s forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation, but was still plagued with emotional and psychological pain. “It was not until I participated in a Rachel’s Vineyard retreat that I got to the root of what was bothering me.”

The weekend retreats are led by a team that includes post-abortive women, professional counselors and priests. Rachel’s Vineyard is open to those of all faiths, Sonntag said. Others suffering from the trauma of abortion – including fathers, grandparents and siblings of aborted babies – are also finding healing through this ministry, she added.

“The weekend is a very specific process designed to help the retreat participants experience the mercy and the compassion of God and this is based totally on scripture. It is also an opportunity to surface and release the vestiges of anger, shame, guilt and grief.”

She read comments from women who have experienced the retreats. “It is the best thing that ever happened to me. It is totally inspired by God and I am grateful to have been brought so gently from the pain into the light. This is not a human endeavor. Only God can do this,” said one participant. Another said that “the spiritual and psychological healing was immeasurable,” while others commented on how they felt safe to share their experiences and emotions, and never felt judged.

Two Rachel’s Vineyard retreats are offered annually in Saskatchewan, one in the spring and one in the fall, Sonntag said. The next one will take place Nov. 6-8 at St. Therese Healing and Growth Centre in Bruno. More information can be found by visiting the website: www.rachelsvineyard.org or calling Bonnie Cameron at 306-445-3158.

A related awareness campaign is also drawing attention to the pain and regret women experience after an abortion, Sonntag said. The Silent No More Awareness Campaign involves women who have experienced abortion giving testimony to the damage it has caused in their lives.

“Any time we appear in public we carry large signs with the words ‘I regret my abortion,’” said



Sonntag. “The purpose for doing this is to counteract the rhetoric that is out there, about how we need abortion, and how a woman has the right to do what she pleases with her own body, and that all women think this is a good thing.” Another goal is to reach out to those who are silently suffering from the devastating psychological, emotional and spiritual effects of an abortion.

Silent No More was founded by Georgette Fourney in January 2001 after she witnessed lopsided media coverage of the March on Life in Washington, DC, which gave only 15 seconds of coverage to the march, as opposed to a two-minute piece about a small group of pro-choice women demonstrating at the event. The next year Fourney went to the pro-choice event wearing the large sign proclaiming that she regrets her abortion.

Supported by Anglicans for Life and Priests for Life, Silent No More can help turn the tide in the pro-life battle, as post-abortive women speak out about their first-hand experience of the pain and anguish of abortion, said Sonntag, noting John Paul II’s words in his gospel of life encyclical, in which he said that women who have experienced an abortion and have been forgiven and healed, can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone’s right to life.

Sonntag reported on some of the activities that Silent No More has been involved in over the past year, including the March for Life in Regina in May, the March for Life in Ottawa, pro-life conferences, Catholic Women’s Leagues and Knights of Columbus events, and gatherings at universities in Vancouver, Calgary and Saskatoon. For more information, visit the website at: www.silentnomoreawareness.org

A number of other presentations were also part of the annual diocesan Administration Day held at St. Mary’s Parish in Saskatoon, covering such topics as marriage and family life ministry in the diocese, contemplative outreach and centring prayer, Catholic education from kindergarten to university, and vocations. Administration Day also marked the launch of the 2009 Bishop’s Annual Appeal..