



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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General Homily Considerations for Healing After Abortion

While many are aware that the Church teaches that abortion is wrong, fewer know of the Church's message that forgiveness and healing are available to every repentant heart. Encouragingly, those perceptions change when respondents are made aware of pastoral efforts like Project Rachel Ministry, the diocesan abortion healing ministry of the Church in the United States.

A homily is one of the most effective ways to reach those suffering after an abortion. This may seem surprising, as many homilists may share a concern that mentioning such a painful topic may only intensify the pain and cause more self-reproach for those involved with a past abortion. These women and men are in our pews, and time and again, we hear that they have been yearning for a compassionate message of mercy that would give them the confidence to seek reconciliation and healing. Lent, the Easter Season, and Divine Mercy Sunday provide ample opportunities for such messages of hope.

Priests should be encouraged to take advantage of these preaching opportunities to ensure that our parishes are, as Pope Francis says, "islands of mercy in a sea of indifference." The following resources are provided to assist:

- *Sample bishop template letter to priests.*
- *General Homily Considerations for Healing After Abortion.*
- *Bishops' Summary of Resources for Diocesan Project Rachel Ministry.*

More information about starting or strengthening a diocesan abortion healing ministry is available from the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities from Mary McClusky, Assistant Director for Project Rachel Ministry Development at mmclusky@usccb.org



project rachel

Peace starts here

Sample Bishop Template Letter to Priests

(Arch/Diocesan Letterhead)

(Date)

Dear Father:

While many are aware that the Church teaches that abortion is wrong, fewer know of the Church's message that forgiveness and healing are available to every repentant heart. It is sobering that recent communications research tells us that many Catholics do not see this compassionate response or may be unaware of the Church's pastoral response to those suffering from a past abortion. Instead, they see the Church as “harsh” and “rigid.”

Encouragingly, those perceptions change when respondents are made aware of pastoral efforts like Project Rachel Ministry that brings hope and healing to women and men suffering emotionally and spiritually after abortion. With 1 out of every 4 pregnancies in our nation ending by abortion, abortion trauma, guilt, and grief affects more and more women and men each year. While most of the work in the Project Rachel Ministry is outreach to women who have undergone abortions, it is important to keep in mind that the burden of abortion pain is also shared by husbands, boyfriends, parents, physicians, and others who encouraged abortion as the “solution” to a challenging pregnancy, as well as family members and friends who grieve someone they lost.

I want to thank those of you who may have already been involved in some area of abortion healing ministry. It is only the all-encompassing, reconciling love of Christ that can truly heal the hurt of abortion. Since such reconciliation and healing are so central to the priesthood, I want to share with you a helpful resource as we approach Lent.

A homily is one of the most effective ways to reach those suffering after an abortion. This may seem surprising, as many homilists may share a concern that mentioning such a painful topic may only intensify the pain and cause more self-reproach for those involved with a past abortion. These women and men are in our pews, and time and again, we hear that they have been yearning for a compassionate message of mercy that would give them the confidence to seek reconciliation and healing. The Lenten season provides ample opportunities for such messages of hope.

Please see the attached ***“General Homily Considerations for Healing After Abortion”*** and consider incorporating the information into your priestly ministry this Lent and beyond. It is vital to share the message of mercy after abortion. It is a work of evangelization to welcome back those who were involved in abortion and feel they are not worthy of God’s love and forgiveness. Your proclamation of Mercy will be a great blessing to our Church and serve as much needed encouragement to those suffering to reach out for help.

With gratitude for your willingness to help those in need of His healing, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

(Name of Ordinary)



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Peace starts here

Homily Considerations for Healing After Abortion

Introduction:

When a homilist is considering preaching on abortion, it may be helpful to ask those present who have been involved in abortion to pray for him:

- That his words of mercy might give consolation and encouragement to those in need of healing.
- That his message might prevent others from experiencing the pain of abortion in their lives.
- That those in need might have the courage to ask for help.

General Points to Consider:

- Acknowledge the loss of those who have experienced abortion. It may be the first time anyone has acknowledged the reality of their child/children and their own grief and pain. A simple statement like “I’m sorry for your loss” can open hearts.
- Invite the congregation to pray for those they may know who have had an abortion.
- Remind people of the boundless mercy of God and encourage them to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Many wrongly believe that abortion is “the unforgivable sin.” They may be longing to hear that God desires to forgive every sin of those who are sorry, even the sin of abortion.
- While respecting confidentiality, tell a story of healing from your own experience, or go to the Project Rachel Ministry national web site page [“Your Stories”](#) for some sample stories. The “Healing” quotations may be most helpful and encouraging.
- If available, mention that the diocesan abortion healing ministry, most often called Project Rachel Ministry, offers confidential help for women, men, grandparents, and other family members and friends who may have been involved in an abortion. Include contact information in the bulletin, the vestibule and church restrooms. Or simply invite those who seek healing to call you or another priest in the coming week. (Though some may prefer to pursue healing opportunities outside of their own parish, for confidentiality).
- Close on a positive note of hope and healing.

Additional Points to Consider:

- Abortion is a difficult topic that may stir unpleasant emotions or trigger very painful wounds. Be prepared that some may cry or even leave. Tears are often part of the healing process. Your words may be a pivotal moment in the painful, but ultimately restorative process of healing.
- Be aware of your audience. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 4 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved.
- An elderly congregation may often include those wounded by abortion decades ago, even before abortion was legalized. Some wait to confess an abortion as they near death.
- Consider a message that is sensitive to children present in the congregation.
- Be mindful that abortion is often tied to national or local politics. Stay away from discussions on policies or legislation when focusing a homily on abortion healing.
- Every homily that mentions abortion should include the message that there is hope and healing after involvement with an abortion. This is particularly important around January 22 and Roe v. Wade commemoration events.
- If the Holy Spirit is guiding you not to specifically bring up abortion, you may still reach those suffering after abortion by preaching about mercy. You might speak of a lasting wound or recurring guilt and remind congregants that Jesus came to heal sinners, that God loves them infinitely, and no sin is too big for God to forgive. Or mention abortion among a list of other serious sins that many may believe are “unforgiveable.”

For more information on abortion healing resources, contact your diocesan abortion healing ministry or visit www.HopeAfterAbortion.org (Spanish: www.EsperanzaPosAborto.org).

PROJECT RACHEL MINISTRY



Project Rachel is the diocesan abortion healing ministry of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is a diocesan-based network of specially trained priests, religious, therapists, and laypersons who provide a team response of care for those suffering in the aftermath of abortion. In addition to referring for Sacramental Reconciliation, the ministry provides an integrated network of services, including pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, support groups, retreats, and referrals to licensed mental health professionals.

Essential components of a diocesan Project Rachel Ministry:

- Jesus Christ's merciful love is the foundation.
- It is a **Diocesan** ministry with approval & oversight of the bishop & involvement of diocesan priests.
- A confidential, designated helpline is answered by screened & trained staff/volunteers.
- An integrated approach to healing addresses the spiritual and psychological suffering due to abortion and provides both one-on-one and group healing opportunities like:

Sacramental Reconciliation

Pastoral counseling

Retreats (one-day and/or weekend)

Spiritual direction

Referrals to mental health professionals

Prayer and liturgy

Support groups

USCCB Resources

Project Rachel Ministry: A Post-Abortion Resource Manual for Priests and Project Rachel Leaders

Committee on Clergy, Vocations and Consecrated Life and the Committee on Pro-Life Activities

1. Contains description of abortion aftermath for mothers and fathers of aborted children, as well as others impacted by abortion.
2. Provides an overview of issues to be considered in pastoral counseling.
3. Addresses concerns that come up in Sacramental Reconciliation.
4. Offers suggestions for creating a welcoming parish environment to foster more frequent recourse to Reconciliation and to direct those in need to contact their diocesan Project Rachel Ministry for confidential help.
5. Suggestions on building and strengthening the diocesan ministry.
6. Canon Law on abortion.
7. Additional Resources, for example, on abortion following a poor prenatal diagnosis.

USCCB Websites: www.HopeAfterAbortion.org and www.esperanzaposaborto.org

These sites (English and Spanish) provide contact information for diocesan Project Rachel Ministries which offer a confidential, dedicated phone help line staffed by screened and trained staff/volunteers. The sites explain the normal reactions to involvement in abortion and feature helpful Scripture passages and

prayers and healing stories of those who have been assisted by diocesan ministry (unique visitors average 53,000 each month on the English site).

- **Project Rachel Ministry Print Brochures and Prayer Cards**

For parishes, health care offices, etc. These resources offer a sensitive approach to the impact of abortion on different people and provide assurance that Divine Mercy is available to every repentant heart.

- **USCCB Conference and Educational Videos**

With the assistance of experienced Project Rachel Ministry directors in several dioceses, the USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities offers a bi-annual national conference for diocesan leaders. The 3-day conference for staff, priests, and lay professional therapists helps ensure that the diocesan Project Rachel Ministry has a solid foundation, is better able to respond to the differing needs of individuals who come for help and offers best practices. 47 videos from previous conferences are available on a private, log-in accessible web site for diocesan use to educate ministry teams and develop local trainings. The most recent conference in February of 2020 in the Brookland/Catholic University of America neighborhood focused on assisting dioceses seeking to begin a diocesan ministry from the ground up. The upcoming March 2022 Virtual Conference will help both more and less experienced ministry team members deepen their understanding of the integrated approach to healing and the dimensions of abortion as sin, grief, and trauma.

Starting or strengthening a diocesan Project Rachel Ministry

- **Establish Ongoing Prayer Support:** religious communities, parishes, Respect Life committees, etc.

- **Review the USCCB Resource Manual:**

Step-by-step instructions can be found in Section Five on “The Diocese.”

Establish a leadership team for the ministry (priests, staff, volunteers, related agency leaders).

Distribute the resource manual to all priests and diocesan leaders to be involved in the ministry.

- **Select Appropriate Diocesan Staff:** Proper screening and discernment are crucial to determine if someone who has experienced pregnancy loss has engaged in the process of healing and is ready to represent the diocese and provide services. It is essential to ensure the safety and enforcement of boundaries for all who are involved.

- **Offer Orientations:** Priests, deacons, screened & licensed mental health professionals, screened staff/volunteers.

- **Ensure Confidentiality:**

Staff a dedicated phone line used only for Project Rachel Ministry callers.

Establish safeguards for confidentiality of files and of conversations, including guidelines for parish personnel where parish priests take referrals.

- **For Assistance with Project Rachel Ministry:**

For more information on developing a diocesan abortion healing ministry, please contact Mary McClusky at mmclusky@usccb.org. Dioceses may request access (or request a new password) to the Directors’-Only private log-in web site to access all ministry development resources by e-mailing Mary McClusky.