

POST-ABORTION RECONCILIATION PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Approved by the Bishops of Florida, September 27, 1992

- I. **CONCEPT.** The Catholic community of Florida should be served by an organized post-abortion counseling program within each diocese with specially trained personnel. The name Project Rachel is often used for these diocesan programs throughout the country and has become recognizable as the Catholic post-abortion counseling program.
- II. **GOAL.** To have trained persons available who understand the unique trauma caused by abortion so that the Church can provide true reconciliation with God, self and others.
- III. **WHO WILL BE SERVED?** While our program is based on our Catholic faith, it is open to anyone who suffers or who has suffered the aftermath of abortion. In addition to the mother of the child, this could include the father, grandparents, friends and health-care professionals.
- IV. **HOW IS THIS ACCOMPLISHED?**
 1. Providing training for those who will administer the Project Rachel program; clergy, lay people, and professionals.
 2. Provide easy access to the service.
 3. Publicize the service.
 4. Set up a process to meet the needs of each client.
- V. **WHO ARE THE POST-ABORTION PERSONNEL?** Ideally there would be three groups:
 1. **Clergy.** Spiritual healing remains the most important element in this program. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the most powerful and necessary component for Catholics. Whenever possible, it is desirable that the person receive the Sacrament from a priest who has been trained in post-abortion counseling.

A Catholic who has already received the Sacrament but remains troubled, can often benefit from a session(s) with a Project Rachael trained priest.

A non-Catholic who seeks the program should also be offered an opportunity to meet with a priest or minister who understands post-abortion trauma and healing.
 2. **Volunteer Professionals.** Many of those who seek this program will have need of professional counseling or treatment prior to or following reconciliation. The post-abortion advisor may want to refer the client to such a professional.
 3. **Lay People.** Carefully selected and trained lay people will be an important component in the program. It should be made clear that lay people, although trained in post-abortion trauma and healing, are not professionals. To insure that the client understands this, a disclaimer could be requested.
- VI. **TRAINING OF PERSONNEL.** Training should include psychological insights into post-traumatic stress (Post-Abortion Syndrome), medical information on fetal development and abortion procedures, and appropriate spiritual guidance for reconciliation and healing including pastoral care information on Canon Law.

Clergy, professionals or lay people should be provided with the same general training and should be given the opportunity to interact at training programs.

The Pro-Life/Respect Life Office should be involved in the selection and training process, as well as the on-going program.

- VII. OBJECT OF PROGRAM. The object of the program is to facilitate healing. The people administering the program serve as God's instruments and should respect the clients' wishes allowing the individual to begin the process at his/her level of healing.
- VIII. STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN INITIAL AND FOLLOW-UP CONTACTS.
1. Listen. The first person the client will speak to will be a vital component in the process and should have the same training as the advisors. Time and patience can be an important factor.
 2. Empathize. The person calling for assistance seeks an empathetic listener as well as direction.
 3. Make clear that the program is ministry of the Catholic Church.
 4. Describe components of the program:
 - a. Confidentiality
 - b. Role of personnel
 - c. Collaboration of lay persons/priests/professional with permission of client
 5. Assist client in determining steps appropriate for her/him
 6. Guide (walk with) the client through the healing process; either individually or by collaboration.
 7. Record appropriate information (ALL RECORDS BEING KEPT CONFIDENTIAL)
- IX. IS THERE A COST? No fee will be involved in the post-abortion counseling process unless additional psychological complications surface which may then require professional counseling. A process to handle these cases beyond the volunteer ministry should be worked out between the diocesan program and professional counselors.