

SPIRITUAL PASTORAL HELP

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Why suffering? This is a common question. Suffering may be caused by our own sinful inclinations, choices that have negative consequences or by the sins of others, but the truth is all will suffer. Christ never promised that we would not suffer, actually he said the exact opposite and tried to prepare us for it, *"If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*¹ Suffering is a part of life and while we can wonder why it is far more productive to learn the art of carrying our cross and seeking ways to help carry the crosses of those around us as Simon of Cyrene did for Christ in His Passion. For Simon, the carrying of the cross of Christ



was a life -experience and a cure for selfishness. He realized that a life grasped too tightly, decays and turns to dust. But if it is given away, it blossoms and bears fruit, for you and for the entire community!² Rather than ask why the many evils of our time or why all this suffering, this paper will discuss the spiritual pastoral aid from the Church offered to those suffering from the effects of an abortion or those dealing with a handicap. The Gospel is intended for all and not a select few. It is most especially for those in the outskirts of society, those whom are sick and in need of a physician, Christ the Divine Physician, and it is for these that he came.

To begin, let us return to the beginning, Genesis states, that *"all were created in the image and likeness of God."*³ This God given dignity is freely given to all God's children and must therefore be recognized in all God's children, no matter how different they may be from others. It is common to be prejudice towards those that may be different in body, mind, or person, although this is not the message of the Gospel. *"The central meaning of Jesus' ministry is bound up with the fact that He sought the company of people who, for one reason or another, were forced to live on the fringe of society. (cf. Mk. 7:37) These He made the special object of His attention, declaring that the last would be first and that the humble would be exalted in His Father's kingdom. (cf. Mt. 20: 16, 23:12) The Church finds its true identity when it fully integrates itself with these marginal people, including those who suffer from physical and psychological disabilities"*⁴ If Christ not only loved but actually sought these "outsiders of society," His disciples and Church should not only love them but create a welcoming home for those with disabilities and provide them with equal opportunity to worship the Lord. This is where the Church and Her members find their true identity. Persons with disabilities are equal in dignity and deserve not only our respect but to be recognized as a full member of our society, contributing and receiving in their own way.

Furthermore peoples with disabilities offer unique gifts to the community. It is those who were blind, deaf, and mute that the scriptures tell us Christ sought after and were the recipients of his healing. With His healing they were able to witness to the liberating power of Christ's love and mercy. *"Persons with disabilities become witnesses for Christ, His healing of their bodies a sign of the spiritual healing He brought to all people."*⁵ Christ's concern for those with disabilities was a trademark of His earthly mission and His Church intends to continue His mission; therefore She must reach out to those in need and seek to bring them closer to the power of Christ's healing touch. The Lord may intend the handicaps of some individuals to remain in order to draw them closer to His Sacred Heart and allow them to share in the carrying of His cross. Our weaknesses and handicaps permit us to trust in the Lord and rely on Him, instead of seeking an autonomous lifestyle apart from Him. By understanding the mission of redemptive suffering united to Christ,

the cross is made fruitful for the individual and the universal mission of Church: the salvation of all.

*"The Gospel of suffering is being written unceasingly, and it speaks unceasingly with the words of this strange paradox: the springs of divine power gush forth precisely in the midst of human weakness. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world's Redemption, and can share this treasure with others...the Church feels the need to have recourse to the value of human sufferings for the salvation of the world."*⁶

Christ may also permit members of families to have handicaps as a means to draw the family out of themselves and to focus on the needs of others. The ways of the Lords are not Man's ways but for those who love the Lord all things work for the good.

Within the ministry of the Church of Christ there is great pastoral care and concern for those with disabilities. It is not the mission of the Church to care solely for the handicap but within the ministry of the Church to minister to them and to include them in the worship of Holy Mother Church and the family of Jesus. *"The Church, through the response of its members to the needs of their neighbors and through its parishes, healthcare institutions and social service agencies, has always attempted to show a pastoral concern for individuals with disabilities."*⁷ First on a diocesan level, it is important to plan in the budget for construction needs making all areas handicap accessible and for the personnel to be trained to pastorally care for those in need. Secondly, on the parish level, the pastor and the pastoral parish council should be aware of and working towards the pastoral needs of the specific handicapped persons in that parish. *"Those who must be institutionalized deserve decent, personalized care and human support as well as the pastoral services of the Christian community"*⁸ It is the responsibility of each human to look out for the needs of their brothers and sisters, to make known to them the saving love and mercy of Christ.

Handicapped persons are not shown the respect God intends in our world today, not even in the womb. If a baby in the womb is detected to have some abnormality, many times the mother and father are encouraged to abort the child. *"Moreover, those babies with severe disabilities who are permitted to be born are sometimes denied ordinary and usual medical procedures"*⁹ This action is clearly opposing God's intended plan for His children, and leave the father and the mother physically and emotionally wounded and abandoned. Current statistics show that in the United States alone 1.2 million births each year end in abortion, which is over 3,000 each day. At the age of 45, 1 in every 3 women will have experienced an abortion.¹⁰ This scourge of abortion has become thought of as a quick fix but it does not fix but only hurt all those involved. Of course there is a major loss with the act of abortion. There is loss of the life of the child, but in this same action three are wounded and many times the parents are not treated or cared for after the trauma of an abortion. The Church has responded to the many walking wounded of Her children: the often times forgotten parents of these aborted babies. There are two main ministries that offer spiritual and pastoral help to those who have committed an abortion, Project Rachel and Rachel's Vineyard Retreats.

Rachel's vineyard was began by, Theresa Karminski Burke, Ph. D., who started one of the first therapeutic support groups for post-aborted women in 1986 after founding The Center for Post Abortion Healing.¹¹ These ministries offer closure for the parents who were told lies about the child in the womb, if the post-abortive symptoms are not dealt with they can become life threatening for the mother or the father.

The ministry is named Rachel, in reference to the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah who speaks of Rachel mourning for her children. The weekend retreat called Rachel's Vineyard, ministers to both men and women who have suffered the effects of an abortion. The weekend is set aside for them to acknowledge the life that was in them, to embrace the person and to encounter the Lord's mercy and forgiveness and let go of the guilt of making the choice to terminate that life. The retreatants are led through scripture and the Paschal Mysteries of Christ; they confront their own sinfulness and, through the mercy of God, are led to their own resurrection in Christ. They are brought to an encounter with Christ and His mercy for them and for the child that was lost to abortion. The retreat is led by a team including a Priest, and offers the Sacrament of

Confession as well as trained consolers for those dealing with the trauma of an abortion. The weekend is intended to begin the process of healing for the parent's or family members involved in an abortion. The second pastoral resource offered for those who have experienced an abortion is called, Project Rachel; which is a type of one-on-one consoling or discipleship a walking with the individual to healing. This process is a long process but there are no limits to the Lord's mercy that he desires to pour out upon his children.

The spiritual and pastoral care that is offered to those who have had an abortion is not limited to these two methods but these have been the most fruitful and common in the life of the Church. Although there are many challenges to this necessary pastoral care, letting people know that this ministry exists is one of the major difficulties. Many who have experienced an abortion do not feel worthy of the mercy of the Lord, which is a lie straight from the enemy and keeps them from the great Divine Mercy of Jesus!

In conclusion the pastoral and spiritual care to be offered to both handicap and post-abortion victims are many within the Church according to the God given dignity given to each of God's children. Applying all that we have learned in the foundations of pastoral theology will help those we serve to receive the true pastoral care of our Good Shepherd, the pastor of all souls.

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¹Holy Bible, New American Bible, USCCB.org, Mt 16:24-25

²Cf; Msgr. Giancarlo Maria Bregantini, Way of the Cross Meditations, April 18th, 2014, Vatican.va, 5th

³Holy Bible, New American Bible, USCCB.org Genesis 1:27

⁴USCCB, Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Council of Bishops, On Persons with Disabilities, Nov. 16, 1978, 12

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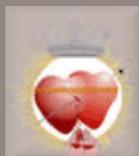
⁸USCCB, On Persons with Disabilities, Nov. 16, 1978, 10

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¹⁰Rachel's Vineyard website, www.rachelsvineyard.org

¹¹Rachelsvineyard.org, Our History

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