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Marriage Preparation and Abortion

Raising the Question of Abortion in Marriage Preparation

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Marriage preparation is a time of great joy and excitement for young couples as they prepare for their special day. Unfortunately abortion is one topic that will not likely come up in meetings with their priest/deacon or in their Pre-Cana class. This can have tragic consequences because without healing, post abortion issues have the potential to become a silent ticking time bomb in a marriage. Given the prevalence of abortion, we know that many of these couples participated in the abortion of a child prior to meeting their future spouse, had an abortion during the engagement-dating period or may have an abortion after they are married.

Abortion creates a *relational* and *spiritual* wound. A healthy marital relationship is marked by a deep bonding between husband and wife with a foundational trust that leads to vibrant and satisfying emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy. Abortion is a traumatic death experience that is closely associated to relational/sexual intimacy creating a profound fracture of trust striking at the heart of the marital foundation (this holds true whether the event preceded a marriage, or was experienced by only one spouse.) Partners experience unresolved, unspoken grief and shame as they struggle with depression, anxiety, and other pain numbing symptoms of trauma that can negatively impact marriage and family life. Extra marital affairs are not uncommon for persons with abortion in their history.

The good news is that with effective healing programs like Rachel's Vineyard, a ministry of Priests For Life, the relationship can become stronger than ever. The Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Process, used in many diocesan and church based outreach has proven to be especially effective at helping couples reclaim the satisfaction and joy of the emotional, physical and spiritual gifts of the marital union.

It is vital for Priests, Deacons and lay pastoral ministers to gently introduce this topic to couples. Bring up the issue in marriage preparation classes, educating couples on how abortion can impact trust and intimacy and

acknowledging how sensitive and difficult it is to open up this secret area of one's past. The man or woman may want to discuss this with you privately before sharing it with their fiancé or spouse. You can respond to their fears and empower them with hope and resources for healing. Encourage them make the healing journey with the support and participation of their fiancée/spouse. Invite couples that have been through the process of healing to share their own testimonies of how abortion impacted their marriage. Place pamphlets for Rachel's Vineyard and other healing resources in the information packets you share in marriage prep and in the parish. Put information on this problem on your parish and diocesan websites with links to healing ministries like RV.

Theresa Burke, PhD., LPC, and Kevin Burke, MSS/LSW are founders of Rachel's Vineyard, a ministry of Priests for Life, offering nationwide retreats for healing after abortion as well as training for church ministries. Rachel's Vineyard can also connect you with information and referrals to men and women who are willing to share their witnesses of healing.

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