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Rachel's Vineyard Founder to Speak on Post-Abortion Trauma

By: Jen Reed

Dr. Theresa Burke, founder of Rachel's Vineyard retreats for post-abortion healing, said in a recent phone interview that women struggling with the emotional pain of an abortion have the same need to mourn as those who lost loved ones on Sept. 11.

"With any death experience, we have all kinds of social means for support," she said, noting all the recovery efforts, free counseling and fundraisers that have taken place in the wake of the terrorist attacks. "Women who have aborted have the same needs. Their loss is like a bomb going off, [but] there are few people who want to help them go through the wreckage."

Dr. Burke's most recent books, *The State of Grief* and *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*, both deal with a woman's need to process the trauma that results from the death of her child. This topic will be part of a presentation she will give next month at a banquet for A Woman's Concern Pregnancy resource Medical Center, Lancaster.

Many women are unable to process post-abortion trauma, Dr. Burke said. As a result, they develop other symptoms that eventually lead them to seek counseling.

However, there has been a great deal of denial of post-abortion trauma from mental health communities, she noted.

"Many [counselors] had their own experiences with abortion. Either they have recommended one...or they've had one," Dr. Burke said. "When a patient wants to talk about something very painful, it can be threatening to the counselor because it elicits their own pain. They will consciously or unconsciously shut-down any kind of dialogue."

The other reason many people in the mental health profession are unwilling to acknowledge post-abortion stress is that many of them counsel for abortion, Dr. Burke continued. "I hope those in the mental health community would come to a deeper understanding of the depth of this problem and not see abortion as the solution for every pregnant woman in crisis," she said.

Psychologists and psychiatrists who fail to acknowledge the emotional trauma of abortion only reinforce to the woman that what she did was right and good for herself, Dr. Burke said. "That doesn't permit the expression of grief, which is what people need to do to heal...What I've learned from the symptoms of not dealing with the loss is that it creates more problems and prolongs the suffering."

Dr. Burke said it is her hope that her books, research and counseling inspire dialogue about the societal factors that keep a woman from grieving the loss of her child. She wants women who suffer from this trauma to have counselors who will validate the experiences.

"There isn't much societal support for women to do the work they need to heal," she said. "All of the efforts of pregnancy centers are just wonderful because they do provide an alternative that women will not hear from a clinic...Most women have abortions because they feel like they don't have any other choice. Being able to support them through a pregnancy and birth is so important."

Dr. Burke noted that "for any situation to be transformed, we need prayer. The best we can do is through our prayers and through our willingness to support women before and after the birth of their children."

Dr. Burke will give her presentation during A Woman's Concern banquet April 19 at Willow valley in Lancaster. For tickets or more information, call A Woman's Concern at 394-1136.



Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

808 N. Henderson Rd.
King of Prussia, PA 19406
610-354-0555—1-877-HOPE-4-ME