



Vine & Branches

Rachel's Vineyard
Healing the Pain of Abortion
One Weekend at a Time

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December 2023

The Beautiful Fruit of that First Christmas Shine Brightly in Rachel's Vineyard By Dr. Theresa & Kevin Burke

In this season of Advent, we are reminded that it was Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel that set in motion the events that would lead to the birth of her son Jesus on that first Christmas.

Such beautiful, salvific fruit continues to flow from this humble act of trust and faith.

In Rachel's Vineyard, we encounter women and men who reach out in humility and trust to find healing and reconciliation with God and loved ones. Like Mary, we see such beautiful fruit come from their assent to the promptings of grace in their lives.

Just as the pain of abortion and the personal and relational symptoms that follow the procedure spread out like [shockwaves](#) from that deep wound, so too the fruits of healing.

We witness these miracles every day in the Lord's Vineyard.

The [testimonies](#) from former Rachel's Vineyard participants can be found on our website. They shine a bright light on the power manifested in the retreat process -- the spiritual power that illuminated the humble manger where God took on our broken human nature to bind our wounds and embrace us as His daughters and sons.

Joy to the World indeed!

*Though he was in the form of God,
he did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
Being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself,
and became obedient to death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name*

*that is above all other names,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should proclaim
to the glory of God the Father:
Jesus Christ is Lord. (Philippians 2: 6-11)*




Is God About to do a Divine Intervention?

By Kevin Burke


You've probably heard the term "Intervention" in the context of addiction. When a family member or friend is struggling with addiction, it can be challenging to get them to admit there is a problem. So you join forces with others to take action in a formal intervention to help the addict see the light, and get the help they need.

The Creator of the Universe may be about to do His own universal spiritual intervention with the human family.

[**To read Kevin's full article, click here!](#)



**"Once in our world,
a Stable had something in it that was bigger
than our whole world."
~ C.S. Lewis**



Meet the Leaders!

The beautiful branches in our vineyard are filled with 'grapes' that have been pressed through difficulty and hardship. Remaining in Jesus, the true Vine, they help turn their adversity into 'good fruit.' We're adding this new feature to our Vine and Branches newsletter to help other members of Rachel's Vineyard get to know some of our phenomenal team leaders.



Fearless and Faithful Women

She's a founder, a third-generation Italian-American, and, like her maternal grandmother, an adventurer. Her grandmother, Phyllis, braved the Trans-Atlantic voyage to New York at the age of 15 – alone, and speaking only Italian. 37 years later, her granddaughter, Donna, was born.

"I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, in a very large, immigrant, Italian, Catholic family," Donna Gardner says. "My grandparents were right off the boat." Both of her grandmothers were devout, and the Catholic Faith was woven into every facet of their lives. "All their children were named after saints," she continues, "and both of my grandmothers had a home altar with candles. When my dad, Anthony, became seriously ill at age 9, his mother Jennie immediately prayed to St. Anthony for his intercession and my father was healed."

Donna's maternal grandmother, Phyllis, walked with her to church for Mass and weekly Confession. And her paternal grandmother, Jennie, was the lead fundraiser for the building of their church (which, amazingly, was completely paid for only six years after its construction). These actions played a major role in supporting Donna's faith formation.



Donna with her Grandmother, Phyllis in June 1992

"Every Sunday was Mass, macaroni, and meatballs," Donna says with a chuckle. All these familial and faithful foundations helped shape her life and worldview. However, during high school, a young man she was dating forced himself on her, and she later discovered she was pregnant. Torn between the strong moral code she was raised with and her fear for the future, she traveled the path of many young women in her circumstances and had an abortion. Soon, guilt and shame began plaguing her. It would be decades before she'd be fully restored.

In college, Donna reconnected with her 8th-grade boyfriend and future husband, Eric. They married and moved to Florida on their first wedding anniversary.

Donna found some healing and relief through "Forgiven and Set Free," a post-abortion bible study for women. First as a participant and later as a leader, she noticed something was missing: the Sacraments. So she met with her parish priest, who helped appropriately add them to the study she was giving.

The following year, one of her friends visited family in New Jersey and discovered Rachel's Vineyard. "It checked all the boxes for a deeper path to healing," Donna said. She and her friend went to a retreat and found what they were looking for.

"God shows up big," she states, "and it's a privilege to partner with Him and watch Him heal people who believe they are unlovable, lost, and forgotten. But He hasn't lost track of them, and when they realize that, their lives are changed forever."

Donna then tells the story of Rebecca,^[1] her roommate at the Rachel's Vineyard retreat she went to.^[2] Rebecca was in her 80s, and on the first night of the retreat, she immediately went to bed once the program ended. The second night, Rebecca didn't come back to the room. Donna assumed she might have been in the chapel, but at 1:00 a.m., she still wasn't there. Out of sheer exhaustion, Donna fell asleep while waiting. At 6:00 a.m., Rebecca walked into the room. Her hair was sticking out in every direction – as if she were wearing a Phyllis Diller wig. But the joy on her face was unmistakable. Referring to her bereavement doll (who

represented her son), she blissfully said, “Daniel and I have been on the swing set all night.”^[3] That was 25 years ago, but Donna still remembers it vividly—and the impact that retreat had on a soul who thought she was lost forever...

While preparing to lead a Rachel’s Vineyard healing retreat for the first time, Donna fell while carrying her one-year-old son. It left her paralyzed on one side of her body, and she had to learn to walk again. She also had to surrender everything to God. She led that first retreat, which was the birth of the Palm Beach site, while awaiting surgery.

As a young site leader, Donna found herself struggling with a performance mentality. Building a team, finding clergy to help, doing intakes and interviewing retreatants began to become a burden. One day Fr. Jorge Torres, the team’s priest, looked at her and softly said, “Donna, be at peace.” Those simple words, spoken in genuine compassion, changed her entire outlook and approach to the Vineyard. “I understood that God was in control,” Donna calmly states, “and I was His Hands and Feet. Since that day many, many years ago, I have had a very different attitude heading into each retreat weekend—and every other day of my life. I’m now known for my ‘Be at peace’ encouragement!”

A portion of that attitude also stems from her grandmother Phyllis. “She was so present to everyone she met, but always attentive and a great listener to me. I felt as if time stopped when she was with me,” Donna states. “She was never in a rush but had one speed: effortless love. She prayed the Rosary and went to Mass and Confession weekly, and I never heard her say a mean word or do anything to hurt someone. Her peace was palpable.”

For 16 years, Donna worked for the Palm Beach Diocese as the Director of Rachel’s Vineyard. During that time, she also brought a national program for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as a prison ministry program for post-abortive male inmates. Going to a maximum-security prison was intimidating at first, but she quickly discovered that the men were very open about their painful past and the memories that still haunted them. Yet, within the confines of their jail cells, they experienced God’s Mercy and Forgiveness through Rachel’s Vineyard. While most of them wish they could go back and change the course of their lives, their relationship with God has transformed their hearts and souls.

In 2017, Donna and Eric founded Magdalene’s Joy, a non-profit under which Rachel’s Vineyard provides retreats to men and women in South Florida, Central and South America, and the Caribbean Islands. Dedicated to supporting, healing, and restoring men and women impacted by abortion, abuse, or other painful experiences, Magdalene’s Joy partially funds the two Palm Beach teams. Emily Babilonia leads the Spanish team, which untiringly brings Rachel’s Vineyard to thousands of women in South and Central America. “Every time she starts a new team, another Bishop calls and asks for a team in his area,” Donna exclaims with a smile. Inspired by the ripple effects of Rachel’s Vineyard, she states, “It’s invigorating to see God take someone’s ‘Yes’ and then watch His healing power extend throughout the world.”

Of course, Donna has seen that ripple effect in the lives of her grandmothers—fearless and faithful women who each said ‘Yes’ to journeying to a new country. Through them, a new family lineage and even a new church were created. For a woman with their DNA, it’s not surprising that Donna’s ‘Yes’ has extended to the development of new ministries serving veterans, men in prison, and women in countries she never thought she’d visit. And when seen through the lens of her

childhood hero, Amelia Earhart, Donna naturally reaches new heights while soaring far and wide. Hers is an amazing adventure for God.

- [1] Rebecca is not her real name.
- [2] Some retreats give participants the option of having a roommate.
- [3] Daniel is the name Rebecca gave her aborted son.

“Fall on your knees,
o hear the angels’ voices
O night divine,
o night when Christ was born.”
~ O Holy Night

**Event of Interest:
Touched by Mercy, Moved by Love**



**Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Bridgeport, PA
December 5, 2023**


Dr. Theresa Burke will present the topic of Trauma and Healing. In this presentation, she discusses the trauma and triggers that women and men suffer as a result of an abortion, abuse, or combat.

After Dr. Burke’s brief lecture, Sharon Doucette will share her testimony about abortion and abuse healing through a Rachel’s Vineyard & Grief to Grace retreats.


Following the testimonies, Dr. Burke will present an interactive Living Scripture meditation that tells of the story of Peter and the other disciples as they encounter the stormy Sea of Galilee one night. When Peter begins to doubt his ability to walk on water, he then begins to sink into the crushing waves of the sea. With cries of helpless and anguish, Peter calls to Jesus to save him from the peril. The story reminds us that when we are in perils of trauma, sorrow, and suffering, we to invite Jesus into our lives to help us manage our hurt with Christ’s Holy and Life-Giving presence.

A Q&A will follow the presentation.

Sacred heart is located just 10 minutes from Rachel's Vineyard's headquarters. This parish serves over 1000 families with Father DiMaria as pastor since 2019. The parish has more-than 50 ministries and include Pro-Life activities that occur weekly, monthly, or annually.




**“Mankind is a great, immense family.
This is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas.”
~ Pope John Paul XXIII**




Did you know...


If you have a priest serving on your team, or assisting in any way with your retreats, that could use some help to cover their parish masses over the weekend, Priests for Life has clergy that can come and share a prolife, pro-healing message at all the masses for the weekend. Just contact us at the Rachel's Vineyard office for more details. 610-354-0555



The **Silent No More Awareness Campaign** is looking for women and men to share their testimonies at the **March for Life** and **West Coast Walk** in San Francisco and Washington D.C. in January. These have proven to be very positive experiences, gathering with others called to share the truth of their experience of abortion, and the Good News of healing. The events welcome testimonies from mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings of aborted children, and former abortion providers who have been on your retreats. Contact the Rachel's Vineyard office for more information. 610-354-0555



Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plain
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strain
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!



Why I'll March for Life By Eileen Craig

This past November, Michigan held their first March for Life.

“I will march because I know from personal experience that abortion is not a solution to an unplanned pregnancy, it's another trauma,” says Eileen Craig.

**To read the full article from The Diocese of Lansing, [click here!](#)



"I will honor Christmas in my heart,
and try to keep it all the year."

~ Charles Dickens




Hearts Restored

By Shelby Siegfried

Nebraska launches statewide post-abortion healing ministry.

"Healing women and men who have been wounded by abortion is critical to stop the cycle of abortion and self-abuse that often comes from an abortion experience," said Jennifer Butcher, a peer counselor and advocate for post-abortion healing, with 25 years of experience with Rachel's Vineyard and Project Rachel in California and Nebraska.

****[To read the full article from the Southern Nebraska Register, click here!](#)**



**"Faith is salted and peppered through everything at Christmas.
And I love at least one night by the Christmas tree
to sing and feel the quiet holiness of that time
that's set apart to celebrate love, friendship,
and God's gift of the Christ child."**

~ Amy Grant



United in Prayer

We know that this time of year can be difficult for those who have suffered loss. We offer our prayers and love to all those in need this Christmas season. May they find peace and healing in the New Year.



**“She will give birth to a son,
and you are to give him the name Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.”
~ Matthew 1:21**

Connect with us!! Rachel's Vineyard Social Media

“I was trepidatious and unsure it would help me before I attended. I had held this secret and this heaviness in my heart so long. It was an amazing experience to journey through the steps of the retreat and feel true love and forgiveness emerge. It was a great blessing to participate and open up and allow the Lord to speak to me. *Transforming!*”

→
RACHELSVINEYARD.ORG


Social Media provides a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with our teams, retreatants, and ministry supporters from around the world! Give us a follow to stay up-to-date with the latest from RV.

[Facebook.com/RachelsVineyard](https://www.facebook.com/RachelsVineyard)


Instagram [@RVHealing](https://www.instagram.com/RVHealing)

Twitter [@RVHealing](https://www.twitter.com/RVHealing)

[Youtube.com/RachelsVineyard](https://www.youtube.com/RachelsVineyard)



“Hear the angels as they’re singing
On the morning of His birth
But how much greater will our song be
When He comes again to Earth.”
~ Bob Kauflin




Additional Healing Retreats from Dr. Theresa Burke


The founder of Rachel's Vineyard, Dr. Theresa Burke, has developed two additional healing retreats: **Grief to Grace: Healing the Wounds of Abuse, Reclaiming the Gift of Human Dignity**, and **Duty to Heal: Finding Peace for a Soldiers Heart**.

To see the retreat schedule for Grief to Grace, [click here!](#)

For more information about Duty to Heal, [click here!](#)



Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth



Upcoming [Rachel's Vineyard](#) Retreat Weekends

We're blessed to share that our 2024 retreat schedule is already filling up with many opportunities to find healing in the New Year! For a full list of upcoming [retreat dates, click here!](#)
(more dates TBA)

Rockford, IL

Contact: Libby Oleferchik Info@rachelvineyardrockford.org
Friday, January 5, 2024
Sunday, January 7, 2024

Guadalajara Jalisco, Mexico

Contact: Sandra Lillingston 3316017473 lillingstons@yahoo.com
Language: Spanish
Friday, January 12, 2024
Sunday, January 14, 2024

Austin, TX

Contact: Sheryle Knorre 512-876-8049 sheryle@healedinmercy.org
Website Address: www.healedinmercy.org
Denomination: Interdenominational
Friday, January 19, 2024
Sunday, January 21, 2024

Orlando, FL

Contact: Carmen Claypoole: English & Spanish 407-222-8584
projectrachel@cflcc.org

Friday, January 19, 2024

Sunday, January 21, 2024

Naguabo, PR

Contact: Patricia Ortiz Rosario 787-398-6591 ortiz_patricia17@yahoo.com
Language: Spanish

Friday, January 26, 2024

Sunday, January 28, 2024

Santa Clarita, CA

Contact: Roseanne Becker 661-510-8258 RachelsvineyardSCV@gmail.com

Friday, January 26, 2024

Sunday, January 28, 2024