



Vine & Branches

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

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January 2024

A Note from Our Founders 2023 Year in Review

To read our full [End of Year Report for 2023, click here!!!](#)

Dear Friends,

We're delighted to share our End of Year Report on another amazing season that reaped abundant blessings! As we celebrate the remarkable harvest of 2023, we also prepare for new growth. A vineyard does not bear fruit once and then die. No, God's plan is much more expansive than what we could ever imagine! The fruits are eternal! So even as the harvest is being collected, we have visions for future crops still yet to be reaped. This is the joy of the vineyard!

Since our beginnings, we've seen Rachel's Vineyard spread throughout the world. We've watched Jesus Christ the Healer touch countless hearts, minds, and souls. And we've witnessed Jesus' lessons about the vineyard: He is the Vine, and we are the branches. His purpose is always for us to remain in Him while going out and bearing fruit that will last.

In the past 40 years, we've also seen how abortion takes its toll on everyone it touches. For many, it is a trauma that leads to division and internal devastation. Indeed, it can destroy physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. It can leave deep scars in relationships and loss within the family. Internal struggles with bitterness, anger, and shame can drain creative energies and redirect us from the significance and purpose for which we were created.

But God has another path, and it's a road Rachel's Vineyard has been traveling every day for decades. This path was founded on promises made by a God who is passionate in His desires to heal! He speaks His promises into our hearts and says through Scripture: Your soul shall become like a well-watered garden... You shall sorrow no more ... I will turn your mourning to joy ... I will comfort you ... turn your sorrow into dancing!

These words reflect the Heart of God for His people. He wants to bless us and make us whole – body, soul, and spirit!

"Behold, I will bring health and healing; I will heal them; and I will reveal to them abundant peace and truth." (Jeremiah 33:6)

The well-beloved carol we sing during Advent, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is a beautiful prayer we can pray or sing in any season. Even amidst the tragedies

of war and civil unrest, violence, and heartache, in Jesus—Whom we trust for guidance and strength—we have hope.

*O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of humankind;
O bid our sad divisions cease,
And be for us our king of peace.*

Isn't this what Rachel's Vineyard is all about? Hope, peace, and the ending of division?

That is what you, our ministry leaders and volunteers—so many gifted and talented women and men, laity and religious throughout the world—are doing. Through your hard work and devotion, you are spreading Jesus' message of forgiveness, faith, love, and hope with a spirit of gentleness and respect. You are providing the means of His Merciful Healing. You are planting the seeds for future crops. We are exceptionally grateful to each of you, who have embraced this ministry and dedicated years—even decades—to the work of planting and tilling the vineyard.


We also offer a warm welcome to all the new teams being assembled as they begin planting new vines. We have deep appreciation for your enthusiasm and inspiration to become involved!

We are blessed by our small but devoted office staff (Katie D'Annunzio, Kelly Dunne, Katie O'Donnell, and Mary Peterson) who work tirelessly to ensure our leaders have the opportunity to consult with us for everything they need to run their sites smoothly. You are all amazing people, and we're so very thankful for all you do and who you are.


It is with grateful hearts that we also thank Frank Pavone, Janet Morana, and the staff at Priests for Life/Gospel of Life Ministries. We are so appreciative of their support and dedication, which makes it possible for our small International Office to assist our leaders and retreat teams throughout the world.

We appreciate all our supporting partners, as well, who represent a myriad of outreach organizations, mental health professionals, pastoral care workers, clergy, pregnancy centers, and the many denominations that offer Rachel's Vineyard Retreats.

In the fullness of Christ's love,
Dr. Theresa Burke and Kevin Burke
Co-Founders, Rachel's Vineyard Ministries



**“I, the Lord, watch over it;
I water it continually.
I guard it day and night
so that no one may harm it.”
~ Isaiah 27:2-3**



National Prayer Service at the March for Life 2024

Start your day at the March for Life with the National Memorial for the Pre-Born and Their Mothers and Fathers (National Prayer Service) on Friday, January 19, 2024, at DAR Constitution Hall, 1776 D St., NW (18th and D), Washington, DC, from 8:30-10:30 am, with a Mass at 7:30 am to be celebrated by Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, TX.

At the 8:30 am interdenominational service, the Pro-Life Recognition Award will be presented to Bishop Strickland, Mark Lee Dickson, founder of the Sanctuary Cities for the Unborn initiative, Sr. Deirdre Byrne, POSC, and Mark Houck. The award winners will deliver remarks, and attendees will be able to greet them after the service. Pro-Life Leader Frank Pavone will deliver a powerful pro-life message, and Dr. Alveda King will also be a special guest.

Sponsored by Priests for Life, National Pro-Life Religious Council, National Institute of Family and Life Advocates, and Catholics for Catholics. Admission is free, and large groups are welcome. This is by far the best way to start your day at the March! It will be a time of prayer, praise, music, and inspiring speakers. Doors open to the public at 7 am.

For more information, see www.NationalPrayerService.com.



**"Prayer is not asking.
Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God,
at His disposition,
and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts."
~ St. Teresa of Calcutta**



Listen Up! Guadalupe Radio Interview of the Week

Listen to this beautiful radio interview with retired physician and Catholic Deacon Michael Bolesta who serves on the Rachel's Vineyard retreat team in Dallas Texas, and Mary Ann, who shares her two abortion experiences and journey to healing in Rachel's Vineyard.

**[Click here](#) to listen!



**"For last year's words belong to last year's language.
And next year's words await another voice."
~ T. S. Eliot**



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.



A Missionary in the Middle of Nowhere

He's calm and unassuming, and describes himself as "a missionary in the middle of nowhere in the Honduran mountains."

One of five children born in Germany to an officer in the British Army, Fr. Augustine Conner, CFR, was raised in a Catholic environment and lived mostly in England but also in Nigeria. He attended a Jesuit college and was looking forward to a future that included a career in the army, wife, and children. His faith at that time "was not fervent."

But a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in 1997 changed everything.

There, he had a profound conversion back to the faith. Then, while attending the Youth Festival, something he never would have entertained on his own started pushing its way into his mind: Our Lady was calling him to become a priest. Hesitant to abandon his own dreams, he prayed silently, telling her that if the priest says, "Raise your hand if you are thinking of becoming a priest," that would be his sign.

Of course, the following day, that's precisely what happened. Verbatim.

Not knowing whether to laugh at the unlikelihood of the situation or sigh with surrender, he raised his hand.

Two years later, he joined the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in New York. "They were young, happy, and had a strong devotion to the Eucharist and Our Lady—the very things I received in Medjugorje," he says with a grin.

As you can imagine, moving from Europe to New York, *and* joining religious life at the same time, was a huge culture shock. "Trying to absorb those two realities was like jumping into cold water," he relates. "We speak the same language, but there's a different mentality. I still think very European." In 1999, he entered the Seminary in Yonkers, New York, and was ordained by Cardinal Edward Egan in 2007.

Later, when Fr. Conner's religious superiors asked him to support the London Rachel's Vineyard site, he joyfully agreed. This entailed another transatlantic move, but, as he was returning to England, it was also a pleasant homecoming. Reminiscing on his experience, Fr. Conner states "I remember participating in a healing day for post-abortive women. They were sharing their testimonies in an environment of trust and confidentiality, and I was deeply affected by their pain—but also by their hope." From there, Fr. Conner headed north where he and his brother, Charlie Conner (who is now a Permanent Deacon), helped start a Rachel's Vineyard site in Leeds.

Five years afterwards, he was asked to move across the Atlantic again—this time, to Nicaragua. He decided to spend the first three years immersing himself in his new culture, learning the language, and understanding the people and their mindset. Then, as in his previous assignments, he helped create the first Rachel's Vineyard team. A good friend from London who moved back to Colombia joined him in running the retreat. The retreat was held in a lovely house in the country, with a river meandering along the property. Everything started beautifully. Then the electricity went out. They quickly learned that the house's running water was linked to its electricity. In other words: they no longer had water, either. The next challenge: the team was hit with some health issues (the retreat participants were fine). "It was a struggle," Fr. Conner states seriously. On the last day of the retreat, he awakened "feeling exhausted." But then he heard the women laughing; it sounded like they were at the river. "I could hear their joy and laughter. It was a drastic difference from how they had arrived." He couldn't help but smile, even amidst the trials that he and the rest of the team were facing.

While in Nicaragua, Fr. Conner also served as the Director of Corazón Puro (Pure Heart), a ministry for young adults. A young woman by the name of Yesica Gonzáles served as the Coordinator of the program. Between Rachel's Vineyard and Corazón Puro, they were running seven to eight retreats a year. At one of their chastity retreats, 70 priests and bishops were present; at another, 70 seminarians. That was a powerful statement about their support of the ministry. "It was a busy five years," Fr. Conner laughs. But he sees the two ministries as working hand-in-hand.

In the area where he lived, he noticed a lack of fatherhood amongst the men. "Most of the men are not taking their paternity seriously," he explains. "That causes big wounds in society. As many people don't have good fathers, they don't know what a good man is. So, there are a lot of single mothers and there are a lot of abortions. That's where Rachel's Vineyard comes in. It's all interrelated." Then he adds, "The virtue of chastity is needed." He and his teams worked nonstop to help the youth and young adults encounter Christ and strengthen their Faith.

He spent eight years in Nicaragua before being asked to cross the Atlantic again. As always, he readily agreed. On this new venture, he was headed to Gibraltar to create a new Rachel's Vineyard site. At that time, Gibraltar was in the midst of passing a referendum to legalize abortion. "The Pro-Life group and members of the Rachel's Vineyard team put up a great fight against it," he says. "Unfortunately, the referendum was approved."

After a year there, he returned to Central America—Honduras, to be precise. His current parish is on the border of El Salvador, and he has approximately 30,000 people and 37 chapels under his care. That would sound daunting to most people, but when he talks about the communities he works with, his eyes sparkle. He's clearly at home "in the middle of nowhere in the Honduran mountains."

But that's not where this story ends.

While Fr. Conner was working in Gibraltar, Yesica (Corazón Puro's Coordinator) made her own transatlantic move to Medjugorje.^[1] While there, her heart was moved to start a Rachel's Vineyard site. Having worked with Fr. Conner for seven years and considering him her spiritual guide, she naturally asked for his assistance. How could he refuse? "I had an encounter with the Lord and Our

Lady in Medjugorje, as well,” he says, smiling. “This is a wonderful and unexpected gift!” So, together with the Oasis of Peace Community (which was founded in Medjugorje) and the Team Leader of Rachel’s Vineyard in Tenerife (Silvia Gonzalez), he helped Yesica with the first Rachel’s Vineyard retreat in Bosnia Herzegovina. Held in mid-October 2023, it was a powerful experience for everyone involved. The members of the Oasis of Peace were invited to join the retreatants on the second evening of the retreat. Every person in the room felt Our Lady’s presence—especially the retreatants, who experienced her love and maternal comfort.

These beautiful, spiritual encounters aren’t limited to the retreatants alone. “When I’m on the retreats,” Fr. Conner explains, “I’m always deeply renewed in my trust in Divine Mercy and in the Goodness of God. I guess on a Rachel’s Vineyard retreat, even the priest is permitted to participate in an incredible manifestation of God’s infinite compassion and kindness—there’s nothing quite like it!”

That aptly describes God’s work in his own life, as well. For this humble Franciscan friar, the past two decades have been filled—not with the lucrative career and family he first desired—but with a life of poverty, prayer, and service to the poor. Yet this has brought him more joy—and more flights across the Atlantic—than he ever dreamed possible. And that seems fitting for a follower of St. Francis, who not only traveled throughout Italy and to the Holy Land, but also sent his friars out to all nations to preach and live the Gospel of Christ.

[\[1\]](#) Read Yesica’s article in our [End of Year Report](#).





**"What lies behind you and what lies in front of you,
pales in comparison to what lies inside of you."
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Mothers Dealing With Miscarriage or Abortion Regret Need Our Support

This article by Kevin and Theresa focuses on the Holiday season and pregnancy loss – but the themes of the piece apply to other times when families come together to share special holidays and celebrations such as birthdays, funerals, weddings etc.

"For many of us, Christmas is a time to step away from the routine of daily life and enjoy holiday celebrations with family and friends. But here at [Rachel's Vineyard](#), an international ministry for healing after abortion, it is one of the busier times of years, especially for our hotline.

I asked Rachel's Vineyard founder Theresa Burke – and my wife – to shed some light on how pregnancy loss can impact women and men during the holidays, and how loved ones can help."

**To read the full article, [click here!!](#)

**"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths."
~ Proverbs 3:5-6**

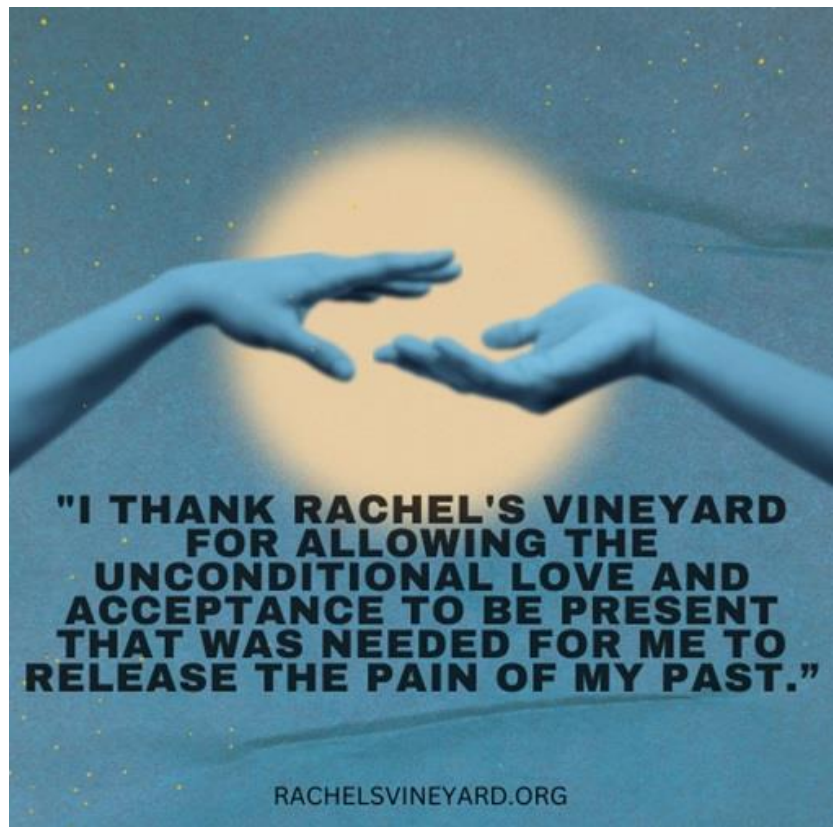
United in Prayer

George F. Griffiths III, Lore Griffiths' husband, passed away at Christmas. Lore is the Site Leader for our Joliet, IL team. Please pray for the family during this difficult time, and for the repose of George's soul.

"For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life."

~ John 3:16

Connect with us!! RV Social Media



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://twitter.com/RVHealing)

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



“Resolve to keep happy,
and your joy and you shall form an
invincible host against difficulties.”
~ Helen Keller




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!](#)



“It's never too late to become who you want to be.
I hope you live a life that you're proud of,
and if you find that you're not,
I hope you have the strength to start over.”
~ F. Scott Fitzgerald



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

Guadalajara Jalisco, Mexico

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

Cypress/Katy (Interdenom), TX

Contact: Mary Lee Mason 866-763-6557 rvinfo@newheartoftexas.org
Website Address: www.newheartoftexas.org
Thursday, February 1, 2024
Saturday, February 3, 2024

Atlanta, GA

Contact: Liz Youngs 404-717-5557 programdirector@pathatl.com
Website Address: www.healingafterabortion.org
Friday, February 9, 2024
Sunday, February 11, 2024

Atlanta (For Military, Veterans, & Families), GA

Contact: Jody Duffy, RN 404-247-9046 military@pathatl.com
Website Address: www.healingafterabortion.org/military
Friday, February 9, 2024
Sunday, February 11, 2024

Note: This retreat will be held in Atlanta, GA.

Cork, ICK, Ireland

Contact: Bernadette Goulding 087 859 2877 bergoulding1@gmail.com
Contact: Anne 085 7829 929 annervireland@gmail.com
Website Address: www.rachelsvineyard.ie
Friday, February 9, 2024
Sunday, February 11, 2024

Midlands/Birmingham, England

Contact: Rachel Mackenzie 07734 059 080 rachelmackenzie1@hotmail.co.uk
Website Address: www.rachelsvineyard.org.uk
Friday, February 9, 2024
Sunday, February 11, 2024

Peoria, IL

Contact: Colleen Harmon 309-264-1489 rvrpeoria@gmail.com
Website Address: www.cdop.org/rachels-vineyard
Friday, February 9, 2024
Sunday, February 11, 2024

Sasaima Cundinamarca, Colombia

Contact: Carmen Yolanda Diaz Cuellar +57-1- 3144888070
carmenyolandadiazcuellar@gmail.com
Language: Spanish
Friday, February 9, 2024
Sunday, February 11, 2024

Lake Charles, LA

Contact: Marjorie Long 337-489-2473
rachels.vineyard@lcdiocese.org
Website Address: www.lcdiocese.org
Friday, February 16, 2024
Sunday, February 18, 2024

Portland, OR

Contact: Karen 541-350-8126 portland@project-aurora.org
Friday, February 16, 2024
Sunday, February 18, 2024

Trenton, NJ

Contact: Judy Warenkiewicz 732-536-6871
judywarren543@msn.com
Friday, February 16, 2024
Sunday, February 18, 2024

Austin, TX

Contact: Sheryle Knorre 512-876-8049 sheryle@healedinmercy.org
Website Address: www.healedinmercy.org
Denomination: Interdenominational
Friday, February 23, 2024
Sunday, February 25, 2024

Bogotá, Colombia

Contact: Martha Elena Soto Rojas 315 8111118
direccion@derechoanacer.org
Language: Spanish
Denomination: Catholic
Friday, February 23, 2024
Sunday, February 25, 2024

Wichita, KS

Contact: Bonnie Toombs (316) 269-4673
toombsb@CatholicDioceseOfWichita.org
Contact: Stephanie Nemechek (316) 269-4673
nemecheks@catholicdioceseofwichita.org
Friday, February 23, 2024
Sunday, February 25, 2024