



Marisol Pfaff knelt during a morning Mass on Aug. 30 at St. Joan of Arc Church in St. Louis. Pfaff had two abortions decades ago. “We need to really open our hearts and really reach out to people because there is a lot of pain and suffering out there,” Pfaff said. “God forgives everything.”
Photo Credit: Jacob Wiegand

Respect Life Apostolate debuts new retreat for those affected directly or indirectly by abortion

Holy Family Hope & Healing Retreat addresses ripple effects of abortion



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Submitted August 31, 2023 | 11:05 AM

The archdiocesan Respect Life Apostolate will debut a retreat this month that will minister to anyone who has been affected by abortion.

The Holy Family Hope & Healing Retreat, which will take place in St. Louis Sept. 15-17, is based on the Entering Canaan post-abortion ministry co-developed by the Sisters of Life and Theresa Bonopartis.

The new retreat model is designed to support mothers and fathers who have been directly impacted by abortion, as well as those caught in the “ripple effect” of abortion, including grandparents, spouses, siblings, adult children and other relatives or friends. (Participants must be at least 18.)

Nearly one in four women have an abortion by the age of 45, according to the Guttmacher Institute, an organization that researches abortion, among other reproductive health topics. While there are many circumstances that contribute to abortion, fear or coercion is often involved. Nearly 70% of women describe their abortions as inconsistent with their own values and preferences, with one in four describing their abortions as unwanted or coerced, according to a study [published in the medical journal Cureus](#) in May.

Marisol Pfaff had two abortions within a year when she was in her early 20s in the mid-1970s. It took years within her healing journey to recognize the effects the abortions had on her family relationships.

“I wasn’t receiving what I wanted to receive, which was accompaniment,” said Pfaff, who coordinates Project Rachel, a complimentary ministry of the Respect Life Apostolate that accompanies post-abortive women with ongoing opportunities for healing. “I had gone to people for help, but they were directing me to abortion.”



Pfaff

Her doctor, who confirmed the pregnancy, and her supervisor at work had suggested to her: “You’re too young” and “you have a great future ahead of you.” Pfaff was offered the opportunity to travel to New York for an abortion, to allow her space to quietly deal with the “problem.”

By the time she told her parents the news of her pregnancy, she had received enough confirmation from others to go through with the abortion. Her parents encouraged her to continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby, but by then, it was too late. Pfaff had made up her mind.

Years later while on a car ride, her mother apologized to her for what had happened. “She said, ‘I’m really sorry for not being there for you,’” Pfaff recalled. “I know that God was healing an open wound in her heart.”

Abortion also may be associated with post abortion syndrome (PAS), a name for the psychological aftereffects of abortion and based on post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms may include guilt, anxiety, depression, distrust in relationships with others and addiction, among others.

“People only think that abortion impacts the mother and child, but it goes far beyond that one decision, and those around the mother are affected as well,” Respect Life Apostolate director Cynthia Haehnel said. “Post-abortion syndrome can have long-lasting implications on those touched by abortion, and that can cause a ripple effect in families and society.”

The weekend retreat complements the Respect Life Apostolate’s expanded Abortion Healing Ministry, which includes additional spiritual, emotional and psychological support through [Project Rachel](#) and [Project Joseph](#), both of which offer healing and hope to women and men wounded by abortion, professional counseling, spiritual direction and other resources.

Project Joseph, a ministry with ongoing support for men who have been directly affected by abortion, is taking a new approach with one-on-one spiritual direction and referrals to professional counseling, said Chuck Raymond, the ministry’s coordinator.

Raymond and his wife, Linda, experienced an abortion in 1976 when Chuck was a senior in high school and Linda was a freshman in college. The Raymonds married several years later and had two more children. They put the abortion behind them, suppressing their emotions about it for years, and later sought healing through the Church. Through their healing process, they discovered the ripple effects the abortion had on their relationships with others.

“Often the symptoms of an abortion trauma in men can be disguised in other behaviors, like anger, trouble in relationships with women and future kids,” Chuck said. The Raymonds saw a direct connection with how they parented their children, including elevated stress and anxiety, and what he described as “very short strings” when it came to their children’s interaction with the opposite sex during the teenage years.

Women and men who have been directly impacted by abortion must first seek healing before the ripple effects can be addressed, the Raymonds said. “We have to make sure that the person who was wounded was healed enough and received strength from the healing,” Chuck said.

>> Abortion healing retreat

A weekend retreat for women, men and couples wounded by abortion will be held Sept. 15-17. The Holy Family Hope & Healing Retreat will be held in a comfortable and prayerful setting in the St. Louis area (exact location shared at registration). Cost is \$100 to attend, which includes two nights of lodging, meals and materials. For more information or to register, contact (314) 406-0815 or hopehealing@archstl.org, or visit archstl.org/hope-healing . All information and inquiries are kept confidential.

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