

Caring for those regretting abortion

Story by Lois Rogers, Correspondent

The pain and suffering experienced by those who have been involved in abortion, and the importance of the Church to extend its mercy to such individuals who seek repentance, were topics discussed when priests of the Diocese gathered for a special presentation April 28.

Presented by Franciscan Father Mariusz Koch and Theresa Bonapartis, who have long been involved in post-abortion ministry, the "Lunch and Learn on Post Abortion Healing in the Year of Mercy" was sponsored by the Respect Life Ministry in the Diocesan Department of Pastoral Care.

The program was scheduled in response to the renewed emphasis on pastoral outreach to those involved with an abortion, said Donna Goodwin, coordinator of Respect Life Ministries.

Its goal was to provide speakers who could share deeper insights with priests on the unique effects of post-

abortion syndrome and the need for healing.

It consisted of an overview of post-abortion stress by Theresa Bonapartis and a focus on the Sacraments as invitation to healing by Franciscan Friar of the Renewal Mariusz Koch, as well as boundaries to be mindful of when counseling.

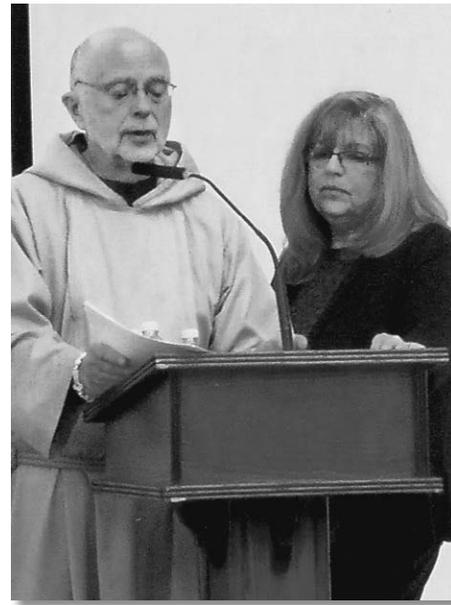
For more than two, very focused hours, Father Koch and Bonapartis shared their insights on the necessity of assisting in post-abortion healing in a Year of Mercy in a country where nearly 58 million unborn children have perished since Roe v. Wade became law in 1973.

They noted the impact abortion has had in the United States, with Guttmacher reporting that in 2014 alone, 21 percent of all pregnancies that ended in abortions were performed on women who have already had more than one.

With 70 percent of women believing abortion is wrong and 28 percent identifying as Catholic, parishes need to recognize the likelihood that those suffering in silence and shame are, Bonapartis said, "all around us, in



PROVIDING CARE AND SUPPORT • Father John Bogacz, parochial vicar of St. Justin the Martyr Parish, Toms River, talks with Deanna Sass, left, diocesan director of the Department of Pastoral Care, and Donna Goodwin, diocesan coordinator of Respect Life Ministry, on what priests can do to minister to those who have experienced abortion.



MESSAGE OF MERCY • Franciscan Friar of the Renewal Mariusz Koch, at the podium, along with Theresa Bonapartis addressed priests of the Diocese on post abortion healing. Lois Rogers photos

"Abortion is always wrong, [but] God's mercy is always there."

the schools, in the work places, in our social lives, in the churches."

Consider, as they pointed out, that is not just the women who sought the abortions who feel the effects, but countless fathers, siblings, grandparents, relatives and friends and the suffering is "everywhere," she said.

"Every single person knows someone suffering problems," said Father Koch, who noted that these problems can range from chemical addiction to eating disorders.

"They may become a work-a-holic. They may be getting high to deaden the pain of abortion – [post-]abortion ministries are seeking to help."

Bonapartis, who has served in many capacities in the post-abortion healing ministry, is the director of Lumina/Hope & Healing after Abortion, which she founded under the arm of Good Counsel Homes, which provides outreach to pregnant women and their children.

Father Koch served as a priest for the Archdiocese of Newark for more than 25 years before joining the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in 1998.

In 2005, along with George Stewart, they began offering retreats for post-abortive men. With Father Koch, she also began retreat days for those suffering from a past abortion.

So many, Bonapartis said, realize that while "God forgave them, they can't forgive themselves" and they

need help to come to grips with the fact that healing must be on God's time. They pointed out that in many parishes, this aspect of the scourge of abortion is never brought to the fore.

"They are waiting for it in the pews," said Bonapartis. "Abortion is always wrong [but] God's mercy is always there."

Taking Concrete Steps

They encouraged the priests to be mindful of the need for discretion and confidentiality as they take a number of steps, including bulletin announcements encouraging those suffering after an abortion to call the parish, and afternoons of remembrance and prayer services at which all the community prays together in an atmosphere of safety where people can come forward.

Deanna Sass, director of the Department of Pastoral Care, who has offered professional counseling and spiritual direction to post-abortive people, said the presentation had a profound effect on her.

"There is need," she said, for those suffering the aftermath, to "talk about their experience, to express their feelings and to find their 'way back' into God's grace in light of a decision," they may have made long ago.

"The main point of the presentation was asking our Church, particularly our priests, to find ways to reach out to offer help and healing" to all those who are suffering.

Among the priests who attended, Father Edward H. Jawidzik, parochial vicar in St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, said the session "pulled together everything the Holy Scriptures and the Church have taught over the years. ... Be merciful – if they repent, they need healing."

The session was very meaningful, said Father John A. Bogacz, parochial vicar in St. Justin the Martyr Parish, Toms River.

"I learned a lot about how to help people who need support." Ultimately, as a priest, he said, "you want to help people and the more you know how to respond, the more people will listen."

Those who attended received a United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' post-abortion resource manual with material from Project Rachel and a CD of the contents which can be printed out in Spanish, said Goodwin.

There is also a packet of information on the programs offered by Bonapartis and Father Koch which also contains information on inexpensive counseling services that any priest or pastor can refer someone to for help even if they have already received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, she said.

Parishes that wish to receive the information may contact Goodwin at (609) 403-7192.

Fifth annual Bishop John C. Reiss Memorial Golf Outing planned

The Diocesan Department of Development will sponsor the fifth annual Bishop John C. Reiss Memorial Golf Outing June 13 at Spring Lake Golf Club, 901 Warren Ave., Spring Lake Heights, to benefit the Charitable Trust for the Aged, Infirm and Disabled Priests of the Diocese of Trenton.

The day will begin with registration from 10:30 to 11:15 a.m., followed by lunch from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. The golf tournament will begin with a prayer by Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., followed

by a shotgun start at 12:30 p.m. and scramble format. Immediately following the tournament will be dinner and cocktails. Highlights include door prizes, a hole-in-one and closest to the pin contests.

The cost for a foursome is \$3,000 and individual golfers are \$800 each and includes full use of the locker room, all beverages and gratuities.

To register or for sponsorship opportunities, visit www.diocesoftrenton.org/golf or contact Alicia Plaag at 609-403-7130; aplaag@diocesoftrenton.org.