

Project Rachel founder wants to give fathers of the unborn a greater voice

Too often, men are left out of the picture when their children's fate is determined

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

Vicki Thorn believes that it's time for society to pay more attention to the men whose partners have abortions.

"If there have been 40 million abortions, that means that 40 million men have lost their babies," she said. "If even one-fourth of them are hurting and ready for help, that's 10 million men who have been impacted."

Thorn is the founder of Project Rachel, an international organization that helps women to heal spiritually after an abortion. She started the organization in 1984 in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wis.

For more than two years, Thorn has been traveling around the country telling people about abortion issues that they might never have considered. Lost fatherhood is one of the topics, and so is the impact of abortion on the extended family and society as a whole. She also presents little-known biological information — for instance, that for the rest of their lives, women carry cells from every baby they have ever conceived.

"When you carry those cells, you never forget a miscarried or aborted baby," said the mother of six, who is a parishioner at St. Catherine's Parish on Center Street in Milwaukee.

Feelings of helplessness

Thorn's newest pro-life focus is a proactive approach that uses science to debunk the casual and common attitude that sex is a recreational activity without consequences.

Her interest in this angle was kindled when, as a member of the Association of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health, she sought information about the anthropology of mothering. One book led to another, and she began studying research conducted in the United States and Europe.

She was particularly interested in the foreign studies on men. She now incorporates the research into her lectures. A lot of it surprises her audiences. Case in point: As men respond to the pheromones emitted by their pregnant partners, she explained, their own bodies undergo hormonal changes and their brains become hardwired for fatherhood. An abortion abruptly ends that biological response.

"I have talked to a number of men who are out in public talking about the loss and the characteristics of men doing grief work [over abortions]," Thorn said.

"We need to empower men because for so long they have bought the other side's lie that fathers don't matter. Men need to find a voice, and we must stop talking about only women [in abortion]."



CNS PHOTO BY NANCY WIECHEC

— VICKI THORN, FOUNDER OF PROJECT RACHEL

"They have a sense of male impotence that 'I could have been protected, but I didn't.' They have a great sense of sadness and of lost fatherhood. They grieve for the child."

Empowering men

Some men develop rage that manifests itself in different ways, such as violence, risky behavior or addictions, she said. Others may not trust a new relationship or they become overly clingy when they do have children. It's also common for a man to quickly impregnate another woman in a subconscious urge to carry their previously aborted fatherhood to term.

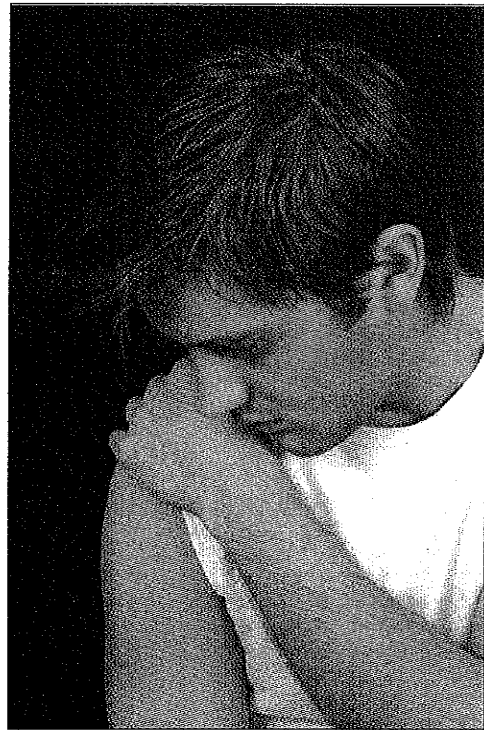
Many men, Thorn said, say that they would stay with their pregnant partners and support them, as was common in previous eras, but they are told that it's "her choice."

"We need to empower men because for so long they have bought the other side's lie that fathers don't matter," she said. "Men need to find a voice, and we must stop talking about only women [in abortion]."

Thorn challenges men to have honorable conduct and to face whether their feelings are love or lust. "If he is only 'in lust' with the woman, he should tell her because her body is going to be changed by this relationship," she said.

The physical effects of sex go beyond the risk of pregnancy or disease. Thorn cites medical studies on how a woman's immune system produces antibodies against male sperm, then takes six months to adapt and recognize him as her mate.

For that reason, casual and multiple sex partners can stress a woman's immune



Many men have a feeling of great sadness after their partners have abortions, says Vicki Thorn. SHUTTERSTOCK

system.

Thorn wants her programs to help people better understand their sexuality so that they can make better choices about their behavior.

"If we have couples waiting for marriage to have sex, we are establishing a much stronger society and doing away with the abortion problem," she said. "We want to help people to understand how God really made us, how awesome we are and how incredibly complex a relationship marriage is."

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.

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