



BRIDGES OF MERCY FOR HEALING AFTER ABORTION

Mercy is a bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

—Pope Francis

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Maria* was going back to Church after her second-grader enrolled in First Communion classes. She didn't know what to say to her daughter after being asked why she didn't go to Communion. Maria had an abortion in her teens and felt that she couldn't go to confession because she had committed an "unforgivable sin."

Li* and his wife, Vanessa*, were attending counseling to address problems in their marriage. Li decided to finally tell Vanessa that, while in college, he had taken his former girlfriend to get an abortion. Vanessa was devastated.

Jennifer* comes from a large, pro-life family that is active in their parish. At the funeral of her devout, beloved mother, Jennifer was despondent beyond the grief of her loss. Jennifer couldn't stop thinking that her mother in heaven would now discover the secret she had kept for thirty years: the existence of her granddaughter, whom Jennifer had aborted in college because she was too ashamed to tell her parents about the pregnancy.

When Darryl* started attending a parish men's prayer group, he began to feel more connected than ever to his faith. But with his increasing engagement, he began to wonder whether God would really forgive him for encouraging and paying for the abortion of his only child.

Maria, Vanessa, Li, Jennifer, and Darryl are among the tens of millions of Americans whose lives have been directly touched by abortion. Like so many others, they have experienced shame, regret, guilt, and grief. But, as they have also experienced, God's healing love and mercy are always possible.

While many Catholics want to help women and men heal from past abortions, most don't know how to begin. Here are a few ways that Catholics of different backgrounds can assist friends, family members, fellow parishioners, clients—or perhaps even themselves:

- ✳ If you are like Jennifer, who had an abortion, read the words of St. John Paul II to women who have had abortions.** Be assured that it is never too late to seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and that "you can with sure hope entrust your child" to the Father and His mercy (EV 99).
- ✳ If someone like Maria reveals an abortion, express your sympathy for her loss. Assure her of God's unconditional love, and encourage her to seek healing and forgiveness. Explain that the U.S. Church's Project Rachel Ministry for healing after abortion offers confidential, compassionate help (www.HopeAfterAbortion.org).

* If you are a priest who fears alienating parishioners, be confident that you can preach on pro-life issues with sensitivity as long as your message reminds the congregation that no matter how serious the sin, God longs to forgive every repentant heart. Many who have participated in abortion like Maria, Li, Jennifer, or Darryl believe they have committed the “unforgivable sin.” Your preaching can be a unique channel of God’s mercy for them, inviting them to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

* If you are a parish faith formation leader, become aware of the potential pastoral encounters with those hurting from past abortions like Maria or Darryl. Work with your pastor to include catechesis on forgiveness and reconciliation.

* If you are a member of your parish pro-life committee, remember those who may be suffering like Jennifer or Li. Regularly highlight information about Project Rachel Ministry and healing after abortion using bulletins, bulletin boards, literature racks, parish webpages and e-newsletters, and any other appropriate means of communication.

* If you are actively involved in public pro-life advocacy which people like Jennifer may encounter, remember to communicate with messages that are respectful, non-judgmental, and compassionate.

* If you are a mental health professional who works with couples like Vanessa and Li, strive to learn more about abortion trauma and how those you are serving may be affected.

* If you are trying to be a devout parent like Jennifer’s mother was, remind your children frequently that you love them unconditionally. Promise they can always come to you when they are troubled or have done something wrong.

* If you belong to a religious community, you can help people like Maria, Vanessa, Li, Jennifer, Darryl, and others by regularly praying for all who suffer from involvement in an abortion.

* If you don’t specifically know anyone in circumstances similar to those of the people mentioned, you still have an important mission. Keep all who suffer after abortion in your prayers, and commit yourself to being an instrument of mercy. Show by your example what it means to ask for and extend forgiveness.

All of us are sinners. Yet Pope Francis calls mercy a “bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness” (MV 2). The Holy Father also reminds us, “As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other” (MV 9). Life is a gift from God and so is his mercy. May we cherish and promote both!

*All names have been changed to protect the privacy of those mentioned.

**See Pope St. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae (Gospel of Life)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), no. 99.



If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, non-judgmental help is available.

Visit HopeAfterAbortion.org, or call Project Rachel Ministry's national, toll-free number: 1-888-456-HOPE (4673).