

CEMETERY OF THE INNOCENTS

The Respect Life Office receive calls regarding installation of the “Cemetery of the Innocents”. The white crosses are a stark reminder of the harsh toll abortion has wrought on our country, and a poignant statement of the tragic cost in breaking God’s greatest commandment, thou shall not kill.

However, behind each and every cross are one or more people grieving the loss of that child – mother, father, grandparent, sibling(s) and more. In their own words, the crosses feel like a ‘slap in the face’, and are a searing reminder of a life lost, of their guilt, shame and pain – even for those faithful who have been on a healing journey through the grace of the Sacraments. Some post abortive women and men feel separated from their faith community during the cross installation, and speak of attending Mass at other parishes or making changes to their driving routes to avoid looking at the crosses.

Our office is NOT suggesting that the Cemetery of the Innocents not be used, quite the contrary. However in the spirit of Pope Francis continual theme of mercy, we encourage balancing the visible white cross installation with strong messages of God’s ‘unfathomable mercy and forgiveness’. It is a fitting reminder of Christ’s ultimate act of love and mercy through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection.

Our statistics tell us that 38% of women who identify a faith tradition during an abortion experience are Roman Catholic. St. John Paul II wrote eloquently to these post abortive women in his papal document, *Evangelium Vitae*, #99:

"I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life."

As the community of believers, we must be the agents of reconciliation by reaching out to these women and men suffering in silence.

Therefore, we encourage you take the following steps, if possible:

- Be sure that your Project Rachel post-abortive healing ministry materials are present and available, both in your gathering space, your offices, on your website, and in the privacy of the confessional. Materials can be sent to you from our office, and they're also available online at <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/project-rachel/>.
- Be sure that Project Rachel post-abortive healing ministry information is placed in your bulletin, newsletter or website.
- Place in your bulletin the below message or something similar:
Today as the white crosses are erected in our parish as an indication of the numbers of babies aborted, may we also then be aware of the women and men who have lost their unborn child because of a " choice" they made. Burdened by the choice they made, we are called as church to call them to a "Time for a second choice to accept God's unconditional love, and forgive themselves" available through the Project Rachel ministry of the Catholic Church. The ministry is a safe and confidential place, the helpline is 513-784-0531.
- If possible, through a yard sign board or other means, place a placard among the crosses that tells people passing by of God's love and mercy available through the Sacrament of Reconciliation in your parish.
- If possible, through a yard sign board or other means, place a placard among the crosses that tells people passing by of the Project Rachel post-abortive healing ministry.
- Talk of the white crosses during homilies, emphasizing not only the consistent life ethic, but of God's mercy and forgiveness achieved through Christ our Lord's death and resurrection. Homily helps that speak to post-abortive men and women are available through our office.
- The USCCB's annual Respect Life Program offers sample petitions that can be used during the universal prayer. That resource can be found online at <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/index.cfm>.
- Finally, encourage prayer during the set up and tear down of the installation of the Cemetery of the Innocents.

Once again, we thank parishes for their strong, visible commitment to the very basic principle of Catholic Social Teaching – that all life, from the moment of conception to natural death, is sacred. If the Family and Respect Life office can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.