

SPECIAL REPORT

DOBBS V. JACKSON WOMEN'S HEALTH ORGANIZATION



U.S. SUPREME COURT DECISION ENDS FEDERAL RIGHT TO ABORTION

Bishop calls for building a 'culture of life' to support women, families

BY MARLENE A. ZLOZA

Northwest Indiana Catholic

MERRILLVILLE – Bishop Robert J. McClory of the Diocese of Gary put the focus on building a “culture of life” in response to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

In what has been called “a ruling for the ages,” the U.S. Supreme Court wiped away 50 years of precedent, declaring there is no constitutional right to abortion, in a 6-3 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Joining Justice Samuel Alito's majority opinion were Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, while Chief Justice John Roberts agreed with the ruling but wrote his own opinion.

Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan filed a joint dissent that equated the decision to “the curtailment of women's rights, and of their status as free and equal citizens.”

The court's decision came as a result of a challenge to a 2018 Mississippi law that bans virtually all abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy. That law allows exceptions for medical emergencies and cases of a “severe fetal abnormality,” but does not make exceptions for rape or incest. The Mississippi law never went into effect, however, because lower courts blocked the state from enforcing it. The U.S. Supreme Court decision reversed those rulings and upheld the original law.

“This is a landmark decision, answering many prayers in the ongoing effort to protect the sanctity of life from conception to natural death,” said Diocese of Gary Bishop Robert J. McClory in a statement issued just after the ruling was announced on June 24. “We are

very encouraged by the decision, as it moves us forward in building a culture that respects and values all life.”

The federal ruling took the position that there is no U.S. Constitutional right to abortion. “This issue will now primarily be decided at the state level, with ongoing federal action as well,” the bishop noted. “Therefore, while we are grateful for this progress, we must remain steadfastly committed to cultivating communities that serve the needs of all people, especially the poor and vulnerable, those on the margins, and those facing extraordinary challenges.”

States will now have the power to make their own laws governing abortion, and it is estimated that as many as 26, including Mississippi, could ban it outright. Thirteen states had already passed “trigger laws” that restrict or prohibit abortion that went into effect immediately following the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

“The Catholic Church is the largest private provider of social services in the U.S., with a long history of serving those in need,” explained Bishop McClory. “Local religious communities, pregnancy care centers, and parish social justice ministries collaborate with other agencies to care for those in need. As missionary disciples of Christ, we bear witness in word and deed to the value of every human life.

“A special report produced by the Northwest Indiana Catholic details the ways our local Church supports women and families in need (dcgary.org).”

Bishop McClory focused on the diocesan commitment to embrace a culture of life.

“In collaboration with local service agencies, we provide women, couples and families with resources to assist them when they are most vulnerable. We must put greater energy into advancing even more resources and alternatives to support women facing challenging pregnancies –

both before and after birth.

“In this ongoing work, we must remain a people of peace and love. We will encounter many people who have differing opinions regarding the practice of abortion. Let us keep our focus on the Lord and our mission as disciples of Christ. We can and must respond to adversity with a gentle spirit, while we remain committed to serving others, as Jesus taught us.

“I am asking the faithful to use the momentum of this pivotal court decision to respond vigorously with prayer and action. As we continue to pray for change in our world, I encourage you to also ask, “What can I do to support women, couples and families facing challenging situations? What can I do to nurture a culture that respects and supports all life? How do my actions reflect the teachings of Christ, to ‘love one another as I have loved you?’

“We are thankful that the Constitution of the United States is no longer construed to give a right to take the life of an unborn human being. This is a milestone decision that brings great hope. Our challenge now is to re-double our efforts to serve our sisters and brothers in need at all stages of life.

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president, and Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, issued a statement calling June 24 “a historic day in the life of our country, one that stirs our thoughts, emotions and prayers.” They also recognized the efforts of many people “to offer care and counseling to women, and to work for alternatives to abortion, including adoption, foster care, and public policies that truly support families.”

U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

USCCB releases statement on U.S. Supreme Court decision in Dobbs v. Jackson

WASHINGTON – In response to the Supreme Court of the United States issuing its ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities issued the following statement:

“This is a historic day in the life of our country, one that stirs our thoughts, emotions and prayers. For nearly fifty years, America has enforced an unjust law that has permitted some to decide whether others can live or die; this policy has resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of preborn children, generations that were denied the right to even be born.

“America was founded on the truth that all men and women are created equal, with God-given rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This truth was grievously denied by the U.S. Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade ruling, which legalized and normalized the taking of innocent human life. We thank God today that the Court has now overturned this decision. We pray that our elected officials will now enact laws and policies that promote and protect the most vulnerable among us.

“Our first thoughts are with the little ones whose lives have been taken since 1973. We mourn their loss, and we entrust their souls to God, who loved them from before all ages and who will love them for all eternity. Our hearts are also with every woman and man who has suffered grievously from abortion; we pray for their healing, and we pledge our continued compassion and support. As a Church, we need to serve those who face difficult pregnancies and surround them with love.

“Today’s decision is also the fruit of the prayers, sacrifices, and advocacy of countless ordinary Americans from every walk of life. Over these long years, millions of our fellow citizens have worked together peacefully to educate and persuade their neighbors about the injustice of abortion, to offer care and counseling to women, and to work for alternatives to abortion, including adoption, foster care, and public policies that truly support families. We share their joy today and we are grateful to them. Their work for the cause of life reflects all that is good in our democracy, and the pro-life movement deserves to be numbered among the great movements for social change and civil rights in our nation’s history.

“Now is the time to begin the work of building a post-Roe America. It is a time for healing wounds and repairing social divisions; it is a time for reasoned reflection and civil dialogue, and for coming together to build a society and economy that supports marriages and families, and where every woman has the support and resources she needs to bring her child into this world in love.

“As religious leaders, we pledge ourselves to continue our service to God’s great plan of love for the human person, and to work with our fellow citizens to fulfill America’s promise to guarantee the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all people.”

“This is a historic day in the life of our country, one that stirs our thoughts, emotions and prayers. For nearly fifty years, America has enforced an unjust law that has permitted some to decide whether others can live or die; this policy has resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of preborn children, generations that were denied the right to even be born.”



Pro-life demonstrators in Washington celebrate outside the Supreme Court on June 24, as the court overruled the landmark Roe v. Wade abortion decision. (CNS photo)

SUPREME COURT OVERTURNS ROE

BY CAROL ZIMMERMANN
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) – In a 5-4 decision June 24, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned its nearly 50-year-old decision in Roe v. Wade that legalized abortion in this country.

The court’s 213-page ruling in Dobbs v Jackson Women’s Health Organization was not totally unexpected due to the leak of an opinion draft a month earlier. The ruling emphasizes that there is no constitutional right to abortion in the United States.

The Dobbs case focused on an abortion clinic in Mississippi opposed to the state’s law banning abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

The court’s reversal of its long-standing abortion ruling brings abortion policy decisions to the state level. At least half of states plan to ban or restrict abortions with this decision in place.

“We hold that Roe and Casey must be overruled,” Justice Samuel Alito wrote in the court’s opinion. Casey v. Planned Parenthood is the 1992 decision that affirmed Roe.

Alito was joined by Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett.

Chief Justice John Roberts, in a separate opinion, said he agreed with the majority that the Mississippi abortion restriction should be upheld, but he said the court should not have overturned its Roe decision.

Alito, writing for the majority, said: “The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision, including the one on which the defenders of Roe and Casey now chiefly rely – the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment.”

U.S. Catholic bishops who have supported a reversal of Roe immediately reacted positively to the court’s decision that comes at the end of this year’s term.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops called the decision a “historic day in the life of our country, one that stirs our thoughts, emotions and prayers.”

“We pray that our elected officials will now enact laws and policies that promote and protect the most vulnerable among us,” said the June 24 statement by Los Angeles

Archbishop José H. Gomez, USCCB president, and Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

“We give thanks to God for today’s decision ... This just decision will save countless innocent children simply waiting to be born,” said the New York Catholic bishops in a statement shortly after the court’s opinion was released.

Protesters were outside the court when the ruling came down, as they have been for days, anticipating it. Those on both sides of issue were also at the court when the document first leaked.

The Dobbs opinion is similar to the leaked draft that called Roe “egregiously wrong from the start.”

Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan wrote a joint dissent that said: “Whatever the exact scope of the coming laws, one result of today’s decision is certain: the curtailment of women’s rights, and of their status as free and equal citizens.”

They also noted that their dissent “with sorrow – for this Court, but more, for the many millions of American women who have today lost a fundamental constitutional protection.”

When the court announced last year that it would take this case, after considering it more than a dozen times since 2020, the justices said they would only review one of the three questions presented to them: “Whether all pre-viability prohibitions on elective abortions are unconstitutional.”

That point of viability – when a fetus is said to be able to survive on its own – was a key point in this case, because the Supreme Court has consistently ruled that states cannot restrict abortion before 24 weeks, or when a fetus could survive on its own.

A friend-of-the-court brief submitted by the USCCB stressed that abortion is not a right created by the Constitution and called it “inherently different from other types of personal decisions to which this court has accorded constitutional protection.”

Referring to the court’s major abortion decisions, the brief also warned that if the Supreme Court “continues to treat abortion as a constitutional issue,” it will face more questions in the future about “what sorts of abortion regulations are permissible.”



Lisa Spudic (from left), Lori Dedelow and Lorraine Moreno make plans to contact resource centers they can tap into for the new Walking With Moms in Need program being established at St. Joseph in Hammond. A core group of five hopes to engage other parishioners in helping support pregnant and parenting mother and families in crisis with material and emotional needs. (Marlene A. Zloza photo)

WALKING WITH MOMS IN NEED

Pregnant/parenting assistance celebrates culture of life in diocese

BY MARLENE A. ZLOZA

Northwest Indiana Catholic

Pregnant and parenting mothers and families in the Diocese of Gary need and deserve the support of the Catholic community, especially those in crisis, and an initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is helping parishes develop a ministry to meet that need.

“Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and our neighborhoods. As Pope Francis reminds us, our parishes need to be ‘islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference.’ Everyone in the parish community should know where to refer a pregnant woman in need,” according to a statement on the USCCB website [usccb.org/profile/walking-moms-need](https://www.usccb.org/profile/walking-moms-need).

Launched in early 2020, Walking With Moms in Need was waylaid by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the USCCB continues updating its resource information to reflect the activities of parishes and dioceses that have implemented the initiative. For instance, the Archdiocese of Detroit has created a short video orientation series based on the Parish Action Guide to help parish leaders start a Walking with Moms in Need ministry.

To get pastors started, Father Rick Holy, director of Pro-Life Activities for the Diocese of Gary, sent out a mailing late last year to introduce Walking With Moms in Need. “In fairness, there is a lot of paperwork involved in registering with the USCCB, and then in February we started to concentrate on developing 2022 Synod action plans,” Father Holy explained. “I’m hoping that many of the parishes included this program in their parish action plans (due to the bishop in June). Hopefully they can now start implementation.”

Doing just that is St. Joseph in Hammond, where a core group of five women is enthusiastic about the initiative, part of the parish’s Synod Action Plan.

“We want to walk outside of the church walls and walk with parenting and pregnant moms in need,” said Lisa Spudic. “We want to link the available resources, because many women have nowhere to turn and we want to be supportive.”

Lorraine Moreno said the core group has already “made a couple of site visits” to agencies that provide services to pregnant women and plans to continue those visits in order to be well-informed and confident about the resources they recommend. “We

were in awe when we visited the Franciscan Prenatal Assistance Program, just down the street. We didn’t know anything about it until we went there.”

The Franciscan Health’s Prenatal Assistance Program expanded from Crown Point to the Franciscan Health Hammond hospital campus about five years ago to combat infant mortality in Northwest Indiana. Expectant mothers with limited resources can access pregnancy education, counseling, peer support and enhanced access to public assistance programs, community services and local hospital programming.

Moms learn about prenatal care, labor and delivery, breastfeeding, car seat safety and CPR. They receive clinical support and education, access to case workers to help them access community programs, and the opportunity to work with a clinical therapist to look after their mental health.

“The Women’s Care Center here in Hammond (sponsored by Catholic Charities) has even more to offer,” added Father Theodore Mens, former diocesan pro-life director and administrator at St. Joseph through June 30, when he accepted senior priest status.

“There is also a new health clinic at the new Hammond Central High School, and we want to find out what they offer,” added Lori Dedelow.

“We want to be able to tell people what to expect and, if necessary, to accompany them,” Moreno said. “We have a lot of parishioners who want to help, but we have to find out how. Maybe we can hold a diaper drive, but we need to know first what the needs are.”

“Often resources are focused on first-time moms, but this program is not just for them,” said Mary Beth Johnsen. “We want to offer services to mothers with several children, too, who may need clothing, food and other resources.”

“The goal of this initiative is about helping to build up a culture of life,” Father Holy said. “The (USCCB) Office of Pro-Life Activities first introduced it in honor of the 25th anniversary of St. Pope John Paul II’s encyclical ‘Evangelium vitae (Gospel of Life).’”

Father Holy, pastor at St. Edward in Lowell, recently updated diocesan activity on Walking With Moms in Need. “I am working with Roseanne Kouris (diocesan coordinator for Family Life in the Office of Marriage and Family Life) and one of my parishioners, who will be the ‘point person’ at St. Edward, on putting together a packet of literature that we will

provide to parishes to enable them to have a ‘ready to go’ Walking with Moms in Need program,” he said.

“All a parish would need to do is appoint a leader/point person and put together a core group of parishioners to be directly involved in responding to moms in need, with the addition of any resources for assistance in their area that may not be included in what we will be providing, they will be good to go,” Father Holy explained.

“Bishop McClory has called us to be disciples and this is our way to reach out to everyone who needs help, maybe even get these families back into our church and our community,” said Lynda Klekowski of the St. Joseph core group.

Nativity of Our Savior in Portage is also exploring a Walking With Moms in Need ministry, while information about the program has been shared with parishioners at St. Patrick in Chesterton.

Currently, any woman or couple in need is welcome to contact their closest Catholic parish for help with pregnancy or parenting resources.



Father Rick Holy (right), pro-life director for the Diocese of Gary and pastor at St. Edward in Lowell, speaks at a First Saturday Rosary for Life service at St. Joseph in Hammond in July 2021. Father Holy is working to establish Walking With Moms groups at local parishes, in cooperation with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to provide resources and support pregnant and parenting mothers and families in crisis. (Marlene A. Zloza/NWIC file photo)

WOMEN'S CARE CENTER

'Meeting women where they are'

BY ANTHONY D. ALONZO

Northwest Indiana Catholic

HAMMOND – In praise of the compassionate support women, their unborn children and families have received, hundreds of clients have spoken, written and posted about the Women's Care Center in Hammond.

Some of their testimonies speak to a sense of being called to the crisis pregnancy center, and most express gratitude that they received the information and care they needed to choose life for the little one they carried.

At the Catholic Charities-supported WCC, a manager, a technician and a counselor recently reflected on their years of providing women with unplanned pregnancies facts about the prenatal journey and personal, spiritual support. Similarly, the three women said they felt drawn to the job, and believe God placed them where they are so they may help make a difference.

"It's just the clients speaking from their hearts," said Angie Navarro, fifth-year ultrasound technician and counselor, of the nearly 500 positive online reviews of the WCC affiliate in Hammond.

Navarro continued, "It's God because there's nothing that we could do ourselves ... God brought us here, God brings the people here.

"It's all divine," added Stefanie Herrera, who has been the WCC Hammond manager since 2014.

In 2015, Freda Chalmers stopped in at the WCC with a simple question: "Where do you need help at?"

Going from a three-day-a-week volunteer, to an integral part of daily functions, Chalmers earned her master's degree and returned to become a full-time counselor at the WCC in April 2018.

"I felt like I could contribute to this," Chalmers said. "I was a young mom in a crisis at one time, too."

Since opening its doors near a Planned Parenthood facility in Hammond in 2012, the Women's Care Center has assisted thousands of women, men and their children. In 2021 alone, WCC aided 1,300 women. The office offered 1,971 counseling sessions, performed 853 ultrasounds, and gave 15,000 material items, including 9,617 bundles of diapers.

Two years ago, the facility moved from rented space to occupy the Catholic Charities Hammond office. In the spacious and welcoming environment, women, men and children are greeted with a smile.

At the Women's Care Center in Hammond, three-month-old Sebastian admires his mother Mary as he sits in a baby carrier in the reception area at the crisis pregnancy center on June 16. The diocesan-funded affiliate of a Midwest-based network providing women counseling, ultrasound procedures, and material support to help them choose life for their unborn child opened in 2012.

(Anthony D. Alonzo photo)



Women's Care Center ultrasound specialist Angie Navarro uses the Voluson P8 3D ultrasound to compare images of the fetal development in the faces of 3- and 6-month-old unborn children at the Hammond crisis pregnancy center on June 16. The Catholic Charities affiliate is part of a Midwest-based network providing women counseling, ultrasound procedures, and material support to help them choose life for their unborn child opened in 2012.

(Anthony D. Alonzo photo)

Herrera, Navarro and Chalmers offer one-on-one, judgment-free counseling. "Meeting women where they are," is key to their approach.

When a woman is invited into the ultrasound room, Navarro stands near the control console of the Voluson P8 3D ultrasound. Presenting a clear visual is what she finds most effective in helping women grasp a full picture of the small human life within them.

Displaying pictures showing a fetus at 3 months and, again, at 6 months, she points to the clearly visible bodily features, including the head, back and arms and legs. Four-dimensional mode can show the motion of a child in utero – sometimes he or she sucking their thumb.

The high-tech machine is a gift from the Knights of Columbus State Culture of Life office.

"You see a life," said Navarro, who tabulated that 89% of women who visit the WCC choose life for their children.

Saddened by the fate of the others, Navarro will often say a prayer, "God receive this baby."

On an early summer afternoon, a woman called Mary and her infant son and two young boys stopped in to visit the WCC counselors. Mary participates in parenting classes for which she gets "credits" to use at the office's "Crib Club" to acquire children's clothing, toys and other accessories.

Sebastian, a sturdy boy of three months, wore a smile as he slept in his baby carrier near his mother.

The WCC continues to connect women with Church, state and medical organizations to offer a spectrum of care and resources including Franciscan Health's Prenatal Assistance Program.

"It always seemed like this job found me," said Herrera. "You know how in the Bible it reads, 'If I can trust you with the little things then I can give you much more?'"

Describing her divorce from her husband of 26 years and the father of their three boys, as "the hardest thing that I went through," Herrera tried to hold her household and herself together.

Enduring the "devastating" change in her life, she said she relied on the practice of her Catholic faith and sought to deepen her relationship with God.

She went about founding a popular after-school mentoring program at the local public high school she worked at.

"We hold a compassion in our heart that we cannot

learn through books, we learn it through our hurt and pain ... there is your purpose," Herrera said.

When she applied for and accepted the position of manager with WCC, Herrera said she was ready to dedicate her skills to help those who find themselves in need of guidance and resources.

For Navarro, who was an experienced sonographer, responding to a listing on a local online jobs board was initially more of a curiosity. "I had no idea why," she said.

She told a hiring manager she would consider an offer, with pay not being the first consideration, but rather because she was aligned with their pro-life values.

"I would say God sent me here to be healed," Navarro explained. "Healing occurs sometimes when you are helping someone else.

She continued, "Have I gone through an abortion? No. But have I been molested? Have I been raped? Have I been abused? Yes. But I had no purpose for that story until I came here."

Herrera said the colleagues responded in godly ways to "forces unknown" that sought to destroy them.

"No matter what a person's belief system," Navarro said. "We can always show them Jesus, they're going to see him here. We can emulate Jesus."

The women who manage the WCC said services to help women choose life will continue even if Indiana is among states that enact laws to re-establish protection for unborn children after the Supreme Court of the United States is expected to render a decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health case. That ruling could nullify Roe v. Wade, the 1973 case which open the doors to an estimated 63 million abortions over 49 years.

Some politicians from Illinois have pre-empted the high court's ruling, promising to pass laws to make the state the "abortion capital of the Midwest." Many current WCC clients are Illinois residents.

If a decision to protect life is rendered, Herrera and Navarro said they will offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the efforts of millions of people's charity, prayer and pro-life advocacy that have helped make it possible.

Yet in a polarized climate reflected in media reports and individual social media messages, they are aware of threats made by some abortion activists to members of the judicial branch, pro-life organizations and even the Catholic Church.

"This is where we have to step out in faith, because we can't worry about what people are thinking and what people are saying: We cannot fear," Herrera said. "Jesus said he would be with us even until the end of time. If we don't believe that, where is our faith?"

"God says, 'Do not fear' 365 times in the Bible," Navarro added.

To contact the Women's Care Center in Hammond, call (219) 554-1774. For more information on making a donation to the crisis pregnancy center, visit www.catholic-charities/donate.



MOTHER FEELS TWICE BLESSED BY SUPPORT AFTER BIRTH OF TWINS

WOMEN’S CARE CENTER IN HAMMOND COMES TO AID OF SINGLE MOM

BY BOB WELLINSKI
NWIC correspondent

“Holding them brings so much joy and happiness, I just want them to be okay. Even when Kaia seems sad, when she cries, she has the most beautiful crying face,” said Kristen Douglas as she gently reassured her whimpering daughter that everything was okay while she tenderly held her. The soft-spoken Douglas was feeding the three-month-old Kaia as her twin sister, Kaylee, slept.

Douglas credits some special angels who have been there for her since she learned of her pregnancy with helping her experience the joys of being a mother again. When the 32-year-old single mother found herself unexpectedly pregnant, she reached out to the Women’s Care Center in Hammond for help.

“Going in there, I had doubts, but talking to (ultrasound technician) Angie (Navarro) really helped. She definitely has been my angel. After talking to her, there was no doubt in my mind that I was going to have them,” said Douglas of her twins.

Douglas shared her story of what led her to the Women’s Care Center and the staff who have walked with her through her pregnancy and continue to be part of her and the twins’ lives.

The thought of being pregnant filled Douglas with anxiety. In 2005, she suffered the devastating loss of her five-month-old son. Still feeling the deep pain of losing her son, she opted for an abortion in 2020.

“It’s not that I don’t want kids. I (just) didn’t want to possibly have another child and have that happen again,” confided Douglas “I don’t want to experience that kind of pain again. That was always in the back of my mind and still is.”

Pregnancy was the last thing on Douglas’ mind when she suffered a couple of anxiety attacks last August. She researched some of her symptoms online, something she admits is probably the “worse thing to do.” The search revealed ectopic pregnancy as one possible cause. A home pregnancy test confirmed she was pregnant.

“Worried, scared, disbelief, all of the above. I couldn’t believe it. It can’t be,” Douglas described her reaction.

Concerned about the possibility of an ectopic pregnancy, and the health of herself and her baby, Douglas tried to get in to see her primary care physician but couldn’t get an appointment. She contacted the Woman’s Care Center in Hammond and was offered an immediate consultation.

“I’m not going to lie, I was scared (and still am) that it could happen again,” admitted Douglas, who once again considered an abortion rather than the death of another child. “I saw Angie and talked with her, and she helped change my feeling about that. She really reassured me. Angie explained that I can’t hold on to ‘what ifs.’ Otherwise, I’d never get to experience the joys and love of motherhood.”



Kristin Douglas (center) poses with Freda Chalmers (left) and Stefanie Herrera (right) during Douglas’s baby shower earlier this year at the Women’s Care Center in Hammond. Chalmers and Herrera work at the center who, along with co-worker Angie Navarro, organized the baby shower for Douglas and her twin girls. (Provided photo)

Other than a younger brother, Douglas has no family support, nor support from the baby’s father, but the staff at the WCC have become her family. She recalled feeling alone during her first pregnancy and now feels she’s receiving complete support. She acknowledges that the personal care afforded her, along with the pre- and post-natal care, have been vital.

Douglas stated she was small in size throughout her pregnancy. To help ease her fears, she regularly visited the WCC for an ultrasound. “It helped ease my mind that they were okay and growing. It helped make my pregnancy easier, as I had a rough pregnancy.”

She added, “Angie has been my rock. Just being able to have someone to call when I wasn’t sure. She has gone above and beyond. She actually gave me a baby shower, which was really, really nice. The staff at the center, Angie, Stefanie (Herrera), and Freda (Chalmers), have been a blessing.” The shower provided items she needed to care for the girls.

Despite being born prematurely, Douglas said the girls were born healthy for the most part. Kaylee and Kaia both weighed just under four pounds at birth and Kaia experienced some respiratory issues, but

she responded quickly to treatment. “They’re growing fast, which is a relief,” Douglas said. “That’s a plus for me, because that lets me know I’m doing what I should be doing.”

Weekly parenting classes at the WCC have given the new mom important tools to care for the twins and herself. “I really don’t do anything for myself now. It’s all about them and I’m okay with that,” said Douglas.

She acknowledged that since the twins are getting bigger and harder to balance, caring for both can be rough at times. She feels her WCC family, and her faith, provide the help and comfort she needs.

Douglas said the journey has strengthened her faith life. She credits Navarro for being the spiritual person in her life. “She’s helped me through things that may have happened, and I don’t understand why. But there’s a reason, even if I can’t see it or understand it. I have to trust God will bring me through it. God has his hand in everything,” said Douglas.

When asked about her plans for the future, Douglas responded, “I want to give my girls everything I never had. I didn’t have my parents growing up. I want them to know they’re loved and cared for, and that they can always come to me.”



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ENGAGING IN CONVERSATION

Distribution of pink bags helps educate people about pregnancy

BY LYNDA J. HEMMERLING
NWIC correspondent

It’s all about the bag. Anyone walking or driving along Connecticut Street east of Broadway and south of 86th Avenue in Merrillville on certain days of the week could be in for a treat – a pink bag with \$20 and some helpful information.

“It’s all about the pink bags, prayers and providing support,” said Tom Jessen, who stands on “The Hill” outside Planned Parenthood and distributes bags throughout the week. “Anyone can do this. We are not pushy. We just talk to people and offer them a pink bag with \$20 attached to it.

“We average (distributing) about 35 per week,” Jessen continued. “We pass out bags to anyone who walks by or stops and talks to us and give even more My Guides to the men, but usually without the pink bags. We support all life.”

The My Guide is a lime green pamphlet that provides a list of free and money-saving resources with help for pregnancy, healthcare, food, jobs, finances and more. About 10 other pamphlets with information regarding pregnancy and healthcare and some snacks are also stuffed in the bags, Jessen noted.

“We hope that the snacks will give them a reason to reach to the bottom of the bag and keep them busy while reading our information,” he said with a grin.

Pat Tuttle, who is a parishioner with Jessen at St. Paul in Valparaiso, puts the bags together. She prints and folds some of the pamphlets, stuffs the items into the bags and staples a small plastic baggie with the money to the outside. She can make about 50 in five hours.



Kevin Karl (left) stands near the small, empty pink and blue chairs set up near Planned Parenthood in Merrillville on June 16 which represent aborted babies that will never sit there. Other volunteers hold signs in support of life.

When she is at “The Hill,” Tuttle said she gives the bags to anyone who walks by, but her primary focus is on those entering the nearby building.

“I like to focus on the ones going inside,” said Tuttle, who is part of the prolife movement because of the positive influence of her parents. “My dad was a founder of the Porter County Right to Life organization. Both my parents were very involved. And then I found this is my calling. This is something I am very passionate about, saving babies and helping women.”

But she is nonetheless an indiscriminate giver. “While I focus on the ones going inside, I give bags to anyone – a lady in her car, an elderly woman on a fixed income from Social Security, or whoever stops.” Often people from other adjacent or nearby health facilities will stop for bags, she explained.

“Passing out the bags is a conversation starter,” said Kevin Karl, member of both the Porter and Lake County Right to Life groups. “I am sometimes ignored, but there are many times when people stop. I have no idea whether they are pregnant or not, or if they are taking the bag for themselves, for family or a friend. I tell them that I have information and that I’d be willing to talk.”

Karl, a Hill Captain outside Planned Parenthood, said he has spoken to hundreds of people and hopes he is making a difference. “I try to do my part to stem the tide of abortion,” he said.

Retired from the health care industry after 30 years, Karl is passionate about life. He has spoken to more than 200 individuals during two 40-Day for Life campaigns. “The resources in the bag are fantastic,” he said.

Jessen agreed, “We are giving them something tangible to help them, not just a hope and a prayer. This information educates them and is informative. The information teaches people about what a pregnancy is and provides help in the situation.”

Jessen said it is fine for volunteers to just pass out a bag, or they have the option to receive “sidewalk training” to feel more comfortable conversing with others. “I really hope we can get more people out here passing out bags. We are always looking for more volunteers!”

People do not need to engage in conversation if they are not inclined. Some people choose to simply pray a Rosary and not engage in conversation.

Pam Mizwicki likes to give bags as well as pray. “We are the hands and feet of the Lord, reaching out to others,” said the St. John the Evangelist parishioner. “I feel it is very important to pray for the unborn. I pray for the women seeking abortion. I like being outreach for the young girls who don’t know what they are doing ... there is



Tom Jessen displays a pink bag June 16 in a Merrillville office. He has been assembling bags which are then distributed to women to provide them with information about pregnancy and assistance. (Lynda J. Hemmerling photos)

a better way.”

Karl, a parishioner at St. Michael the Archangel in Schererville, has two daughters and nine grandchildren. “I love to be here to help people, to help families, women and children,”

he said. “Some people just appreciate having someone to listen to them. I talk and listen. Most of the people don’t tell me their names. They can be slow to engage, but the bag is a great conversation starter.”



MONSIGNOR ROBERT B. WEIS
COUNCIL 10596

*Encouraging and supporting
Choosing Life resources
available for expectant mothers.*

**Catholic Charities,
Womens Resource Center,
New Haven Baby Boxes,
The Gabriel Project
and Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe,
the patroness of unborn children.**



PROJECT RACHEL AND RACHEL’S VINEYARD

Catholic ministry strives to heal in the aftermath of abortion

BY ERIN CISZCZON
Northwest Indiana Catholic

To heal a wounded heart. To find others who are understanding. To receive Christ’s mercy. And to finally forgive oneself. These are just some of the graces women have received through Project Rachel.

Project Rachel was started in 1984 by Vicki Thorn in the Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisc. The ministry seeks to offer support to those suffering in the aftermath of abortion. It is traditionally a diocesan-based network of specially trained priests, religious, counselors and laypersons who provide a team response of care. It is open to all – people of all faiths or no faith.

Project Rachel is the “umbrella” term for all programs that involve weekly support groups, retreats, counseling and spiritual guidance. It is named after Rachel in the Bible, who weeps “for her lost children.”

Rosanne Kouris started working with Project Rachel and underwent training offered by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) during her employment at Catholic Charities.

In 2018, while some aspects of Project Rachel were halted due to budget constraints at Catholic Charities, Kouris was able to continue Rachel’s Vineyard when she came to work for the Diocese of Gary. As the coordinator of Family Life and Marriage Prep, she organizes the retreats several times a year.

Rachel’s Vineyard provides a safe place to renew, rebuild and redeem hearts broken by abortion. The

weekend retreats offer a supportive, confidential and non-judgmental environment where women and men can express, release and reconcile painful post-abortive emotions to begin the process of restoration, renewal and healing.

Since abortion is usually a carefully guarded secret, many people find it hard to process their experience and acknowledge their emotions. Buried feelings can cause other problems, even years after the abortion, such as eating disorders, depression, guilt, drug and alcohol abuse, intense sorrow, worthlessness, anger, flashbacks, panic attacks, suicidal urges, feelings of abandonment by God and the inability to forgive oneself.

“Most men and women, because the wound of abortion is so deep, can’t get over it just by going to confession,” Kouris said. “They should be – the grace is there, and the sin is forgiven – but they themselves can’t forgive themselves and that’s what we hear over and over again.”

Kouris describes the retreats as intense and biblically based. She is often pleasantly surprised by women who appear unready to begin the healing process but end up finding a sense of peace by the end of the three days.

“It works every time. It’s just amazing,” she said. “Friday night they come in and everyone is crying. Then the masks start to drop as you get into some of the exercises. They start being real with themselves and there’s a lot of tears and a lot of guilt and shame ... and by Sunday there’s tears, but it’s tears of joy. It’s totally different.”

For Kouris, watching the transformation in the women is like witnessing a type of resurrection. It’s

those moments, she explained, that are the reason why she got involved in the ministry. “To be there and to walk with these people and experience that is a boost to your own faith and an absolute wonder at the miracles that God can perform,” Kouris said.

Kouris also pointed out that it’s not only women that need healing after abortion – men can also suffer from loss. For example, she met a grandfather who drove his granddaughter to an abortion clinic and continued to struggle with the guilt during the decades that followed.

Kouris acknowledges that the topic of abortion is unpleasant but hopes to continue spreading awareness of programs like Rachel’s Vineyard. She is also optimistic that more services of Project Rachel can be revitalized within the Diocese of Gary in the future.

“I would like for it to be well-known,” she said. “I always get told when I go to churches that they are so surprised that they’ve never heard of it before. And they are so surprised that the Catholic church supports a program like this.”

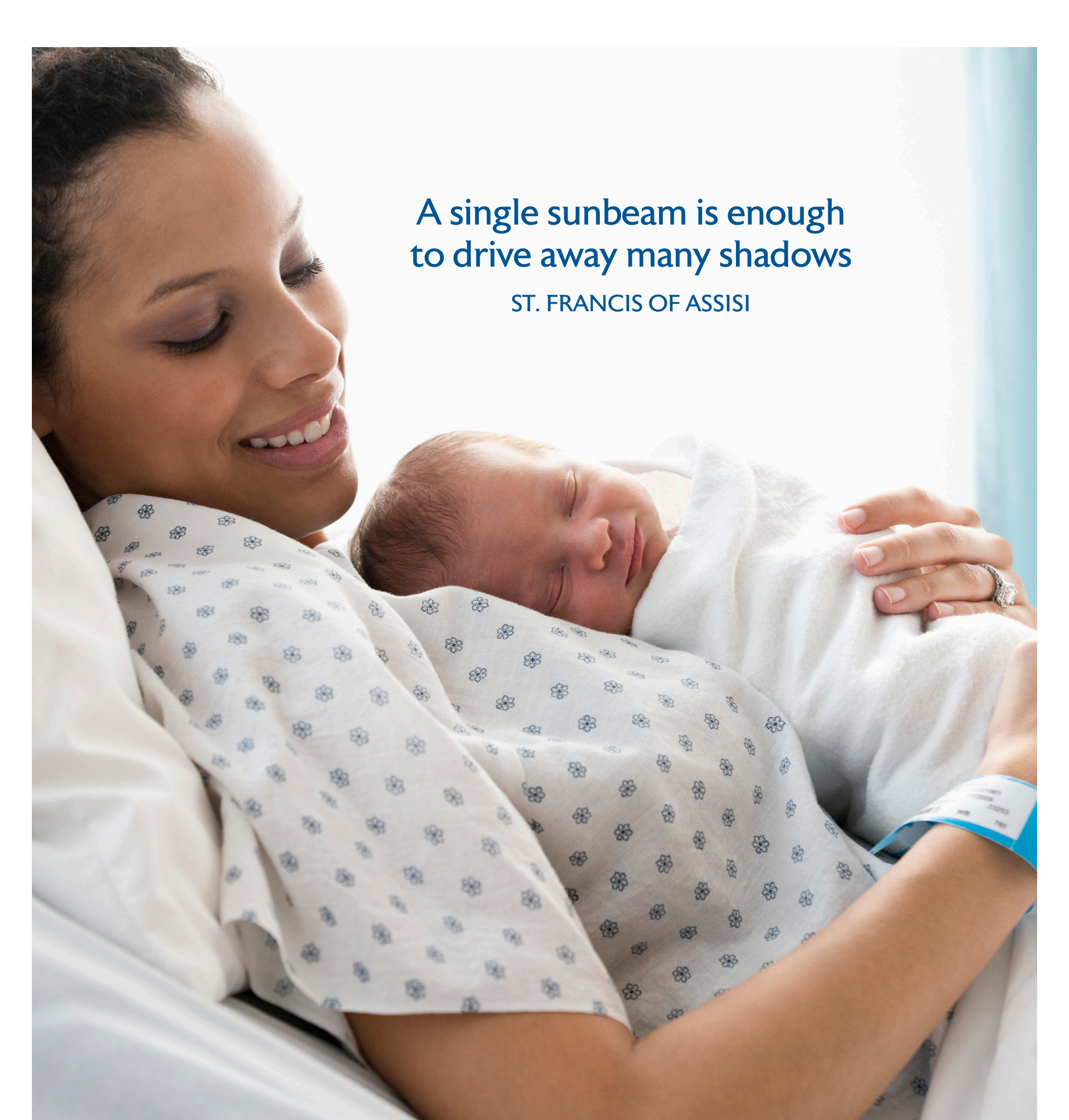
Rachel Vineyard retreats are held in the spring and fall in Michigan City. The next weekend is scheduled for Sept. 30–Oct. 2. To register, call 552-2944 or email nwinrv@outlook.com. All inquiries are confidential.

“Rachel’s Vineyard is an important retreat which offers an encounter with the Lord in word and sacrament to bring about healing and restoration of the soul from the wound of abortion,” said Sean Martin, director of evangelization, catechesis and family life. “It certainly is a compassionate and loving apostolate.”

“I went to the March for Life in Washington D.C. in 2009 and I sat with a woman who had had an abortion some thirty years earlier, she was in her 50’s. This woman told me that not only did she regret having the abortion but that there was an empty spot in her life even after all those years because she mourned for the child she never had. I think people need to know and think about the emotional pain that results from an abortion before they casually condemn someone.

A program like Project Rachel can be beneficial first and foremost because it offers a safe ‘place’ for a woman who has had an abortion to confront her pain and sorrow in a caring and supportive environment. This pertains as well to men or family members who are likewise dealing with the effects of abortion, even after many years. My hope for the future is that the Diocese of Gary will find a way to restart the Project Rachel program (to complement Rachel’s Vineyard retreats).”

~ DEACON JOHN BACON,
HOLY NAME OF JESUS, CEDAR LAKE



A single sunbeam is enough
to drive away many shadows

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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