



Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life National Symposium

Walking with Love: Alternatives and Responses to Abortion

Introduction

There are an estimated 90,000 abortions in Australia each year¹, yet 87 percent of Australians believe that it would be a good thing if the number of abortions were reduced while at the same time protecting existing legal rights to freely choose abortion².

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) Taskforce on Pastoral Responses to Abortion has recommended educational strategies and pastoral and practical support for people who are facing an unwanted or difficult pregnancy. Recommendation 5 of the Taskforce was for a National Symposium to be conducted in every capital city of Australia to engage in dialogue with and educate Catholics and the wider community about the Church's teaching and pastoral responses to issues surrounding sexuality, pregnancy and abortion.

Objectives

- × To discuss and acknowledge the ways in which the Church can put the Gospel of Life into practice to empower women and those who have lost a child through abortion.
- × To change perspectives by promoting the Gospel ethos of forgiveness and healing, and care and respect for human life.
- × To offer people and society positive ways of freeing women to make life-affirming decisions.
- × To present the pro-life perspective that is woman-centred, identifying with their issues and problems.

Audience

The intended audience is all people of goodwill, including women, their husbands or partners and families, service providers, professionals and pro-life groups.

¹ Statistics for 2005 from NSW Right to Life, *Abortion in Australia into the 21st Century: Facts, Current Trends and A Way Ahead*, Sydney: NSW Right to Life, 2006

² Marcia Riordan in "Moving Beyond the Polarised Debate Over Abortion: The Way of the Future" in *Common Ground?* compiled by Dr. John Fleming and Dr N Tonti-Filippini, Melbourne: St. Paul's Publications, 2007.

Outcomes

- × Educate Catholics and the wider community about the Church's teaching and pastoral responses to issues surrounding sexuality, pregnancy and abortion.
- × Engage in dialogue and foster closer working relationships amongst those who "encounter" vulnerable pregnant women and those suffering the effects of an abortion.

Special Focus Areas

There are three particular areas of focus:

- × Pregnancy counselling: assisting women to make good decisions
- × Practical assistance to women during pregnancy and after birth.
- × Post abortion healing: to embrace those who are suffering after an abortion

Whilst it is acknowledged that preventative strategies around sexuality education and relationships are integral to empowering women, the Symposium will not be addressing this in the first instance but useful resources will be made available on a website and featured in the proposed DVD for the Symposia.

Key Deliverables

- × Symposium in eight capital cities commencing Melbourne (1 December 2007), Sydney (2 February 2008), Perth (16 Feb 2008), Hobart (5 Apr 2008), Brisbane (19 April 2008), Darwin (17 May 2008), Adelaide (6 Sept 2008) and Canberra (2 Dec 2008).
- × Production of a website with facilities to purchase DVDs, provide feedback confidentially, and register to attend a Symposium.
- × Production of a DVD Pack *Walking with Love* showing decision-making pregnancy counselling and post abortion healing, together with supportive strategies that are integral to empowering women.

Angela Lecomber, Life Issues Projects
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
Secretariat for Pastoral Life
GPO Box 368
Canberra ACT 2601