#### Continued from page 8

That problem, she added, is gradually becoming recognized nationwide.

"I think we are in the pioneer times of dealing with post abortion syndrome," Sister Vandegaer said.

The syndrome was recognized just 10 years ago, Sister Vandegaer explained. Articles about the problem have begun to appear only in the past five years, and books about it are starting to appear.

The syndrome, Sister Vandegaer suggested, has not gained more wide-scale recognition in part because to admit that it exists means to acknowledge that there's more to an abortion than some people would like to admit. .

"Women who have abortions have to deny the problems," she said. "They live in a society that denies problems associated with abortion.'

Thus, the emotional and psychological effects of abortions are often hidden beneath layers of denial and rationalization. As a result, they surface in a whole series of other problems, including chronic depressions, suicide, eating disorders, and drug and alcohol problems.

"One of the big problems is that people come to agencies with the associated (symptoms) and are treated for the associated (symptoms), but not the underlying problem," Sister Vandegaer said.

That underlying problem, she contended, is that when a woman has an abortion, she must deny the feelings that developed

when she first became pregnant. The emotional life of a pregnant woman prepares the woman to have a child, she said, but when she has an abortion the woman has to deny those feelings exist in order to preserve her ego.

Complicating therapists' ability to recognize the woman's problems as resulting from an abortion is the problem that the symptoms sometimes don't manifest themselves for many years.

Camille Taylor said, for example, that some of the people who come to Birthright don't begin to show the symptoms until three to five years after the abortion.

"I've heard stories of people well out of childbearing who begin to show signs of it," Taylor said. She added that even when signs of the syndrome are present, some women are simply not ready to deal with the root cause. "The best we can do is say if you feel like talking about it, we are here," she said.

Sister Sharon Bailey, SSJ, co-director of Corpus Christi Center and one of the people who helped develop the idea for the support group the center is now forming, said that she encountered post abortion syndrome when she was in pediatric practice in Elmira.

One of the ways that the syndrome sometimes surfaces is through exposure to situations somehow related to abortion - particularly a subsequent pregnancy, or contact with infants.

Support groups become increasingly important when women begin to recognize their problem, Sister Vandegaer said. She pointed out that she now spends a great

deal of her time traveling around the country explaining the syndrome and ways of treating it.

Groups such as Project Rachel are forming in dioceses across the United States to provide support similar to that provided by the Puzzle Project.

In fact, Project Rachel is becoming so well known, Father Winterkorn said, that the Puzzle Project is soon to be renamed Project Rachel to take advantage of the national publicity. His own group is expanding, he said, because the demand is increasing.

"The minute that there's anything written about (post abortion syndrome), then I get calls," he said.

Father Winterkorn also estimated that approximately 10 percent of the calls he receives are from men. Sister Vandegaer noted that men too suffer effects from abor-

"Men in the same situation handle the stress slightly differently, but they experience the same symptoms," Sister Vandegaer said. The syndrome affects men's ability to trust women, she added, and often leaves the men angry because they either didn't know about the abortion at the time it took place, or had no say in the decision.

What people affected by abortion need is often just permission to have feelings about it, Sister Vandegaer observed. As part of the treatment process, women are encouraged to mourn the death of the baby. In some cases, the women are even advised to give the unborn child a name, and to visualize the child.

Sister Vandegaer also expressed interest in the healing service at the cathedral. She said the only other example of such an event that she knew of is in New York City, where the archdiocese's Respect Life Office sponsors a monthly service. Approximately 70-80 people attend each one, she said.

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Ken Maher, director of the Catholic Family Center's Justice and Peace Office. said that the service may become an annual event because of the response to it. In fact, he said, a group of women approached Bishop Clark at the end of the service and made that request.

In dealing with post abortion stress syndrome, Sister Vandegaer said, therapists and counselors must keep in mind that the process is slow, and often has to unravel years of denial, repression and secrecy.

"Abortion is never fully healed," she explained. "Sometimes, we heal only in parts."

#### Club seeks new members

Catholic women interested in socializing and charitable giving are invited to join the Catholic Women's Club of Rochester.

Among the club's activities are: sponsoring scholarships to Catholic high schools, organizing an annual clothing drive, and providing volunteers.

Prospective members are invited to call 716/461-9173, Monday through Friday between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Observers are also welcome to attend the club's annual Christmas Tea, Dec. 3, at 492 East Ave. Guests should bring a gift-wrapped food item for the Carmelite nuns.

# **CLASSIFIEDS**

#### General

#### Card of Thanks 2

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#### **Announcements 7**

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