

RESPECT LIFE

Continued from page 1

ture of death rather than a culture of life. Other conception-to-birth issues include embryonic stem-cell research, partial-birth abortion and human cloning. Prior to *Roe v. Wade*, she said, discussion of these issues would not have been tolerated. Now, trying to determine when a baby is actually a human life is a hot topic.

"That's pretty far down the slope," she said.

The continuum of life issues needs to be brought to the attention of the entire country, Armantrout said, especially since Jan. 22, 2003, marks the 30th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Regional meetings earlier this year between diocesan officials and representatives of parishes and social-justice groups showed people around the diocese agree, making abortion a priority public-policy for the diocese.

Armantrout expects a strong diocesan presence at the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 22, 2003. In previous years, diocesan participants never gathered together at the march, nor were they granted audiences with local congressional representatives. On the rare occasion there was an audience, people from the diocese did not know how to lobby properly.

This year, Armantrout said, participants will meet at the march and will wear stickers showing that they are from the Diocese of Rochester. Armantrout is also taking a lead role in getting audiences with local congressional representatives.

The diocese will also sponsor a training day at the Pastoral Center in Gates Saturday, Jan. 11, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. to teach march participants lobbying techniques.

The diocese is asking that Masses Jan. 18-19 be dedicated to building a culture of life, and asks parishes to include in their bulletins a Respect Life letter from Bishop Matthew H. Clark. It also is encouraging the use of homily aids and sample prayers of the faithful that have been provided to parishes. A special diocesan Mass also is being considered for Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Armantrout and Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry, are also creating a program and liturgy for young people to make them aware of and get them involved in conception-to-birth issues.

"They're growing up in a culture that tolerates abortion," Armantrout said. "Social problems we see today have only been intensified by a culture and society that accepts the destruction of human life for convenience or as an answer



to desperate cries for help."

FINDING HEALING

Two years after having an abortion, Alice married Joe. Both pushed memories of the abortion from their minds and tried to lead a normal life.

Joe was the first to confront the issue of the abortion a few years after he and Alice were married, when he revealed the abortion to a priest during confession.

"I felt so relieved," Joe said. "There's a sort of burden that you carry with you."

But Alice could not ask for help or forgiveness until several years after her husband's confession. Not until the birth of her first child did she realize all she had lost through

the abortion.

"When you become a parent is when it hits you the most. I started realizing that abortion doesn't make sense," she said. "As time progressed, I was needing to find healing for my own self."

She turned for help to a Christian counselor who suggested she speak with Father Tony Mugavero at St. Bridget Church in Rochester. Father Mugavero then referred her to Father Jim Hewes, pastor of St. John the Evangelist/St. Patrick parishes in Clyde and Savannah and coordinator of the diocesan Project Rachel program.

Project Rachel is a confidential, one-on-one healing ministry for women who have had abortions, Father Hewes said, explaining that it

is based on an eight-step process: telling the story of the abortion; naming the sex of the baby; naming the child; holding a memorial for the child; writing a letter to the child; inner healing; the sacrament of reconciliation; and closure, which may include the need for further therapy.

"I felt like I was healing at each step," said Alice, who went through the Project Rachel program. "It gives you your child back."

Joe also took part in the Project Rachel process with his wife.

"It was an incredible process for us," said Joe, who noted that men also suffer because of abortion. "For myself, it was wonderful. It was equally wonderful to see that (Alice) could let go a little bit."

"I have been amazed at the amount of mercy and healing and forgiveness through this project," added Alice, who thanks her Christian counselor and Fathers Mugavero and Hewes for helping change her life.

Although both Joe and Alice say they will continue to be affected by the abortion for the rest of their lives, they are happy they could find forgiveness.

"I had never admitted before that I had lost a child," Alice said. "Now, I can feel that connection."



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