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Healing Italy's Abortion Survivors

California Native Takes Rachel's Vineyard to the Old World

By Elizabeth Lev

ROME, OCT. 21, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- In 1767, European missionaries traveled to California to bring a message of hope and love through the Gospel; 250 years later those seeds have returned to the Old World to bear fruit.

Monika Rodman, a native of the San Francisco Bay Area, moved to Southern Italy in 2007 and brought with her [Rachel's Vineyard](#), a ministry conceived for women who have suffered abortions.

I had the good fortune to meet this pioneer from the New World during the 5th World Prayer Congress for Life in Rome in early October, where Rodman was publicizing her upcoming Rachel's Vineyard [retreat](#) this Nov. 5-7 in Bologna.

In the United States, where more than 50 million abortions have been performed since the 1973 Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade legalized it, the topic of abortion is much discussed and serves as potent political fodder. The multi-billion dollar business of abortion lobbies the government for funding and is omnipresent in the form of clinics in every city in the United States.

Italy legalized abortion in 1978. Through the mid-80s, there were an average of 230,000 abortions a year; the number declined in the 90s to an average of about 130,000. Abortion is technically only legal during the first trimester, with exceptions made for second trimester abortions, performed for fetal abnormalities that are deemed to psychologically harm the mother. Italians rarely discuss abortion, and a political party would never stand or fall on the question.

Despite differences in the social discourse surrounding abortion, Monika Rodman found one thing in common: Women who had gone through abortions were isolated, suffering and uncared for on either side of the oceans.

Rodman noted that "Omert ," the Southern Italian code of silence, reigns not only in the Mafia-ridden regions of Sicily, but also in the culture of abortion. Rodman says, "Your pro-abortion rights friends say 'get over it' and you naturally fear condemnation from those who call themselves pro-life. Either way, post-abortive women quickly realize theirs is an unspeakable loss and a grief they must hide." Even more so in Italy, Rodman points out, where "many people live with their families of origin, where the topic is never to be discussed."

"Abortion is a universal wound, and it is hard to heal," says Rodman after working for 12 years on the Rachel's Vineyard project in Oakland, California, before moving to Puglia. The silence surrounding abortion in both countries causes the wound to fester rather than heal, often destroying families, marriages and relationships with God.

Rodman notes some interesting contrasts. Unlike the United States, where only 20% of abortions are performed in married women, in Italy two-thirds of abortions are obtained by married women. This trauma of the death of a child grows through denial as the couple never speaks of it and it thus moves underground, often damaging the marriage at its foundation.

Another particularly Italian case is that of mothers who force unmarried daughters in their 20s into abortions

because they are "too young" and will hurt their chances for marriage or career. After the trauma of the abortion, the mother and daughter will continue living together, often for years, with unspoken resentment building between them.

In Italy, abortions are most often performed in hospitals, and covered by the state-sponsored health care system. These procedures take place on the same floor as the delivery wards, so women recovering from abortions see all the joyful new mothers as they enter and exit the building, adding to their own personal pain.

Rodman says that abortion statistics are not quite accurate in Italy, as many are performed illegally, or outside the parameters of the law (i.e. paid in cash at a private office). Some women want to avoid the seven-day waiting period, others would rather not go on record and still others are afraid to go to the public hospital for fear of being recognized. These women are even more isolated from assistance and healing.

Monica Rodman organizes retreats for Italian women who have undergone abortions. While the weekends are thus far offered only in the north, participants have also come from central and southern Italy. The retreat team includes both a psychologist and a priest, and the Rachel's Vineyard method offers Scripture exercises and the sacraments, as well as a commemorative service for the unborn child. During this period of reflection, prayer and sharing experiences with other women and men who have known similar suffering, many start the long road of healing.

Rachel's Vineyard has been greeted with encouragement by several Italian dioceses and has found a strong ally in Italy's network of Catholic counseling centers, founded as an alternative to the Italian family planning centers that sprung up in the 1970s. Women contact Rodman through her Internet [site](#), and referrals from friends, clergy, pregnancy help and Catholic counseling centers. Having understood the particularly private nature of abortion in Italy, she is very, very careful about discretion.

Rodman's Italian apostolate is not only fueled by love, but was brought by love. Her marriage to Domenico Montanaro in 2007 brought Rodman to Italy, but also brought her husband to Rachel's Vineyard. Her strongest supporter, Mr. Montanaro surprises with his impassioned advocacy, his clear understanding and his compassion. As Italian poet Virgil would put it, "Omnes vincit amor."

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