

### **Ritual of Naming and Healing before or after an abortion**

**Purpose:** To name prevalent emotional elements in considering an abortion, having an abortion, or coping after an abortion. This example will list four common emotions: hope, sorrow, relief and loss. This is not an exhaustive list of what women feel; be sure to acknowledge other significant feelings which a counseling client shares.

This ritual is malleable, and it is merely an example of how to perform a healing ritual with multiple participants. Ritual participants can include the woman and her friends, family and partner. This ritual can also be easily modified to include only the clergy counselor and the counseling client. What follows are the basic suggestions for the ritual; the specifics of the ritual will rise organically from the particular story of those involved. This ritual does not include written liturgy. Rather, suggestions are made as to what the clergy may want to say and when.

Preparation for the ritual:

1. It is helpful to discuss some or all of the following questions when preparing for the ritual, although they may have been covered during counseling:

◇ What are your prevalent feelings about your abortion decision or experience?

◇ How are you coping with the feelings? What do you do that gives you peace and comfort?

◇ What does your spirituality, theology or faith tell you about abortion?

◇ How do your spiritual thoughts about abortion fit in with your spirituality as a whole?

◇ Why do you want to have a ritual? What do you want to get out of this ritual? What do you want to feel afterwards?

2. Give each participant four pieces of paper, each a different color. Each color corresponds to one of the common feelings which have been identified previously. Each participant is asked to write a word, statement or phrase which finishes the sentences "Hope is . . .", "Sorrow is . . .", "Relief is . . ." and "Loss is . . ." Participants may write whatever they choose (personal statement, poetic image, description, prayer, etc.). The paper will then be placed in four bowls or containers according to color.

3. Have participants bring significant or symbolic items to the ritual space, and create an altar together. Partners, friends and family members can be asked to bring items which remind them of the woman's strength, love, commitment, etc.

#### **Ritual:**

Participants gather around the altar. Music may be helpful to focus the group.

**Litany:** The clergyperson may want to write a litany based on things said by the participant(s) in counseling. The litany can be made up of important revelations, strong feelings, favorite Scripture passages or significant questions. The litany may list the reasons why the woman is considering abortion or has chosen abortion.

#### **Thanksgiving prayer:**

The clergyperson may want to say a prayer of gratitude for the woman and her gifts, for the support of her friends and family, for the sharing of her story and truth, for the clinicians who helped her through her abortion, for her faithfulness to her God, etc.

#### **Naming and witnessing ritual:**

The four bowls will be passed around the circle. Each participant will choose one piece of paper from each bowl. Moving around the circle, everyone will read from the papers, one at a time. Once all have been read, participants are asked to rip up the colored paper and scattered the new pieces on the altar. At this time, the clergyperson may choose to say some words about this act symbolizing how abortion is one part of a whole life with God, this choice will integrate into the woman's life as a faithful person, etc.

#### **Silent meditation**

Alternatively, there are some guided meditations that help a woman reflect on her experience and discover what the gift of the pregnancy is. (see [www.pregnancyoptions.info/healingafter](http://www.pregnancyoptions.info/healingafter))

#### **Ritual of releasing and remembering:**

A pile of stones and a large bowl of water will be set on the altar. Participants are invited to take a stone home with them (as a symbol of remembering what has been experienced and heard) and are invited to take a stone and drop it in the bowl as a symbol of "letting go," of allowing our stories and emotions to return to the God, Christ, Spirit or cosmos from which they came.

#### **Blessing:**

**Close with a blessing of the participant(s).**

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