



Building a Ministry of Hope and Healing: A Christian Perspective to Supporting Women After an Abortion

By
Reverend Susan Criscione

As a minister, I am troubled that women and girls who have abortions are silenced about their experience. I am concerned that the church has become a place of judgment and is viewed as the last place that a woman or girl would turn for support and healing after an abortion.

One million six hundred thousand women and girls have abortions every year in the United States. Many of these women are Christians. The church needs to be a place of nurture, care and support for these women and girls and for all other Christian women throughout their lives.

As a child I learned that because God loves and accepts everyone the church was designed as a place of love and acceptance. As an adult I long for the church to continue to be that place. Rather than intimidating women by telling them having an abortion separates them from God, it is important that the church accept women who have abortions.

The ministry the church is called to do is not about defining the rightness or wrongness of abortion. Christian women will always have abortions, despite the church's stance for or against it. After abortion, the church should offer a safe space that supports women's decisions. This does not require ministers and other church leaders to be pro-choice or even hide their own questions about abortion. Rather, it requires ministers to not judge, criticize or in other ways conform to or promote a universal understanding of each woman's unique experience.

By coming to a minister to share her feelings, the woman is offering a holy gift. To acknowledge this gift and walk with her as she sorts it out is one of the greatest gifts a minister can return. I believe that the most important support a minister can offer in this situation is simply listening to a woman's story and allowing her to name what it is she needs to heal. A minister can acknowledge her needs and assure her that God was and is with her through her decision and healing process.

Exhale is a place where women and girls can share the reality of their experience and be accepted and supported. By allowing women to give voice to their experience, Exhale respects women's experience and women's ability to articulate their experience for themselves. Exhale believes that women can speak their truth and be trusted.

Exhale provides a much needed example for Christian communities as we begin to think of the ways in which the church could be a place of hope and healing for women who need the space to speak about the experience of abortion.

The Reverend Susan Criscione works at the First Baptist Church of Beverly, Massachusetts and is an Exhale Co-Founder. This article was taken from, *"For the Well-Being of All: Towards a Christian Theology of Pastoral Care for Women Who Have Chosen Abortion"* by Susan Criscione. © Susan Criscione, 2002