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Home for Expectant Mothers to Confront Abortion's Aftermath

By Vincent Gragnani

ESCONDIDO – In a quiet North County neighborhood stands a four bedroom house that will soon become known as the Martha and Mary House, a home for women in crisis pregnancies. Its founder, Sarah Oftedal, emigrated from Norway at the age of 21. An Orthodox Christian, she has spent nearly two decades studying post abortion syndrome and ministering to women and men who have lost children by abortion. In the 1980's she co-founded Abortion Survivors Anonymous, and developed a 12-step program dealing with grief and reconciliation post abortion. The program is now used nation wide.

Although Martha and Mary House will operate as a nonprofit group under the Orthodox Church in America, it will be open to any woman who chooses not to have an abortion, with preference given to women who have had abortions in the past.

“They will have opportunity to work through unfinished post abortion issues before giving birth,” says Oftedal. ASA groups meet weekly at the home.

Martha and Mary House will have room for four pregnant women, as well as two mature Orthodox women who will serve as house ‘mother’ and ‘grandmother’.

Oftedal has lived in the home since September. She moved in with only a few pieces of furniture, but with the help of generous donors the house is now fully furnished.

“God put it all together. He color co-ordinates and has wonderful taste,” she smiles, noting how items from many sources have found a perfect place in the home.

Each room has taken on a theme, and is named for a Saint, such as Martha and Mary of Bethany, Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth New Martyr, and Mary of Egypt.

Patron Saint of the House is Elizabeth New Martyr who was canonized in 1981 by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. She was a Grand Duchess who became a nun and founded the Martha and Mary Convent in Moscow, serving the poor, the sick and the orphaned. In 1918 the Communist government closed the convent and Elizabeth was thrown alive into an abandoned mineshaft where she died.

“Just as Martha and Mary showed hospitality to Jesus, we in Martha and Mary House pray to serve him in the women and their unborn children who come to us, “ says Oftedal.

Morning and evening prayers will be part of daily life in the House, along with other opportunities for learning and growing. A variety of classes and workshops, from sculpting and writing to sewing, nutrition and gardening. “The needs of the girls will direct what we do,” says Oftedal. “We hope to provide them with better resources for continuing their lives and making choices when they leave here.”

Depending on their situation, women will be allowed to continue their stay at Martha and Mary House for up to three months after their children are born.

Rosemary Benefield, who runs Rachel's Hope Post-Abortion Retreats for Catholic and Catholic Friendly Women, has known Oftedal for many years. “She is like a wise mother,” Benefield says. “I love to work with her.”

When Benefield encounters non-Catholic women who need healing or women who need more

than a week-end retreat, she refers them to Oftedal's 12-Step program.
For more information on the Martha and Mary House or Abortion Survivors Anonymous, call Sarah Oftedal at (760) 741-7050, or write to P.O.Box 1680, Escondido, CA 92033.