



## CATHOLIC PSYCHOLOGISTS OFFER HOPE AND HEALING

by Carolee McGrath

**C**HRISTINA LYNCH had always wanted to be a mother. However, she and her husband, Patrick, now married for 23 years, were unable to have biological children. Trusting in God's plan and remaining open to life, they followed him where he led.

It just so happened that he led them to pray in front of an abortion clinic near their home in Lake Arrowhead, California. Over time, their public witness turned into a life-saving ministry when they began taking in pregnant women in crisis who had nowhere else to turn.

"Many of these women had been post-abortive. Many of them believed in God, but they didn't believe they were deserving of God's love," says Christina. In 1994, with the help of their parish, Our Lady of the Lake, she and her husband opened Veronica's Home for pregnant women and their children.

"We had five women at one time and five children, and [the women] were all pregnant. My husband and I literally were houseparents. We became godparents to the babies," recalls Christina.

Many of the women suffered trauma and had deep wounds from past abortions.

"That's when I felt the call from God to have another vocation, a vocation within

my vocation of marriage," Christina said. "This was a special call to become a doctor who is grounded in Catholic anthropology."

So Christina, who was in the business world, went back to school to become a psychologist. Dr. Christina Lynch, PsyD, graduated from the Institute for Psychological Studies (IPS) in Arlington, Virginia. IPS is a Catholic graduate school of psychology and is rooted in the Catholic view of the person, marriage, and family.

"As professionally trained clinicians we can provide clinical tools to be supportive and help clients with their emotional suffering. As Catholics our anthropology rightly orders our view of suffering for the ultimate good of the person and his or her dignity as a human being," she explains. "That means viewing suffering as something to eliminate would be unrealistic, given our human nature. Rather, understanding inevitable suffering in light of Catholic anthropology can help us treat our clients holistically: mind, body, and spirit."

Dr. Lynch, now the director of psychological services for St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver, Colorado, is also the president of the Catholic Psychotherapy Association (CPA). The mission of CPA is to support mental health



*Dr. Christina Lynch and her husband, Patrick*

professionals who seek to integrate the teachings of the Catholic Church and the healing of Jesus into their practice. CPA and its members are consecrated to Our Mother of Good Counsel.

“We are very well-trained professionals in our field who have the gift to understand the human person from a Catholic perspective.”

But, Dr. Lynch adds, there’s no magic wand that makes problems just go away.

“As Catholic psychotherapists we cannot ever promise that suffering or problems will disappear magically, or that God is to blame for them,” she says. “Our approach is the same as any secular psychotherapist in helping our clients understand the root of the problems, whether their own choices or tragic unforeseeable events in their lives. And then it’s helping them to understand how they can make healthy choices in the future.”

### **FAITH-BASED COUNSELING**

Dr. Lynch says there’s a great demand for therapists willing to incorporate their faith.

“We are busier than we could ever imagine. There’s a big demand for

faith-based counseling. You don’t have to push it on people.”

Dr. Gregory Bottaro, PsyD, a clinical psychologist in New York City, agrees. He founded the Catholic Psych Institute to help connect people with Catholic therapists.

“Being a Catholic psychologist first and foremost forms me. It really has to do with who I am and how I see others . . . I see people the way God intended them to be,” he says.

Dr. Bottaro, who is married with two small children, spent a few years discerning religious life. “I took a leave of absence in grad school. I went to the Bronx and joined the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. I spent almost four years with them. During that time, I discerned I was called to get married.”

So, after making his temporary vows, Bottaro left and went back to graduate school at IPS in Virginia, the same school Dr. Lynch attended. Now Dr. Bottaro is following God’s call by helping people to heal.



*Dr. Gregory Bottaro, PsyD*

“As a clinical psychologist I am trained to work with any type of psychological disorder, anxiety, or depression. I do a lot of work with severe trauma,” he says.

Dr. Bottaro gets most of his referrals from local Catholic parishes.

“I’ve had priests calling me from every diocese in the area because they couldn’t find psychologists they could trust.”

He adds that the integration of Catholic philosophy and theology with psychology offers a better outcome for many religious clients.

“If someone is Catholic, I can also bring that into the therapy. If there are wounds a person suffered from their family, we can call on the individual’s spiritual relationship with Mary or Joseph to heal the motherhood or fatherhood wounds in their heart,” he explains.

Dr. Bottaro also works with married couples on the brink of divorce.

“I treat the marriage as if it’s my client. The sacramental grace from the marriage is what heals the marriage,” Dr. Bottaro says. “It’s the most amazing, most powerful miracle to witness. The grace is real, and it heals the marriage.”

### **BE NOT AFRAID**

Like Drs. Bottaro and Lynch, Dr. Timothy Lock, PhD, also felt God calling him to help people heal from emotional problems. Dr. Lock, a clinical psychologist for 14 years, practices in Fairfield County, Connecticut. He helps people who suffer from trauma, anxiety, and depression, as well as those who struggle with sexual identity. Dr. Lock is on the board of Courage International, a Catholic support group that assists men and women with same-sex attraction to live

chaste lives in communion with God.

The father of eight children, he says Catholic psychologists fill an enormous gap for people seeking help.

“Catholics need a place to go where they will not be looked at as strange—or worse, pathological—for practicing their faith, a place where their spirituality will be encouraged by the inclusion of traditions that are helpful in their healing journey, and a place where their moral lives will be respected and supported—and not contradicted,” say Dr. Lock, who has been married for 21 years. “A place where their spiritual struggles can be distinguished from their psychological issues [and] a place where the therapist has the same ultimate goal for the client as the client has for herself-or-himself: eternal life.”

Dr. Lock grew up Catholic but questioned his faith as a young adult. He had a strong conversion experience in graduate school, which eventually led him back to the Catholic Church. “I re-entered the church and went to confession—and my faith sky rocketed.”

St. John Paul II also had a major impact on Dr. Lock’s life and career.

“St. John Paul II said, ‘Be not afraid.’ However, he added an additional twist that is classic in the spiritual life under the topic of self-knowledge . . . St. John Paul II said, ‘Be not afraid to know yourself!’”

John Paul II went on to say, “Yes, it is a dangerous journey to know ourselves. We will know the good and the true and the beautiful, but we will also see the sin, the lies, and the dark side. He was not afraid to admit this. He was, in fact, so emotionally mature himself that he was able to encourage the rest of us to ‘go there.’”

When we understand our weaknesses and struggles, what St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians becomes clear: “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong,” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Like Drs. Lynch and Bottaro, Dr. Lock agrees that therapy is hard work. He says it’s not good enough to just believe that problems will go away. He uses the example of dental hygiene.

“If we simply had nice, pious thoughts about dental hygiene before going to sleep, it would do our teeth no real good. In God’s providence, he has provided the toothbrush and toothpaste to properly clean our teeth. This might seem like a ridiculous example, but it is also profound,” says Dr. Lock.

“How often do we have pious thoughts about mental health without doing something about it? Similarly, pious thoughts

about decreasing depression or managing anxiety or conquering co-dependency will do very little to actually change these conditions. We have to roll up our sleeves, examine the causes of these problems, and dive into healing the issues in the natural realm that are prompting these painful emotions and behaviors.”

But all three psychologists agree that, with hard work, God is always near.

“Through our baptism we are united to Christ,” says Dr. Bottaro, “and the perfection of Christ’s heart heals the wounds or imperfection in our hearts.” 

---

*Carolee McGrath, a hockey mom of five, writes from Massachusetts. A former news anchor and reporter in Connecticut, she now covers pro-life issues for the Diocese of Springfield’s news program and magazine. Carolee is also a co-host on Catholic TV’s women’s show, *The Gist*.*



*Dr. Timothy Lock, PhD and his family*

Copyright of Catholic Digest is the property of Bayard, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.