



Interfaith Addiction And Recovery Coalition

Periodic
Newsletter

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We are the non-profit Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition of Savannah, founded in January, 2019. We provide education and support for our faith leaders on the subject of addiction and recovery. Our aim is to prepare you to offer the counsel that your faith community needs at a time when addiction in many forms has increased in our country.

In this issue:

* Rev. Steve Hilgeman, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, shares his personal experience with addiction and recovery.

*Learn how ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) can contribute to substance abuse in adulthood...and what you need to know.

*Discover more about how families are affected by addiction and what you can learn in a free, day-long virtual education program offered by Hazelden Betty Ford to our faith leaders (and your lay leaders). Choose from several dates weekly.

*Read what one wife and parent – and a member of our Coalition – has learned about addiction and her response to it.

***MARK YOUR CALENDAR: January 12, 2021 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM EST**

Register for a special presentation by Jerry Moe, National Director of Children's Programs created expressly for Savannah faith leaders on how children are affected by addiction.

We will send you registration information soon.

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Discovering Grace

Rev. Steve Hilgeman
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
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I grew up in an extended family that was filled with "social drinkers," although my brothers and I always knew which relatives consumed the most booze at family reunions and Christmas parties. From a distance I learned that drinking lots of alcohol led to lots of laughing and lots of talking; as an introverted child, I learned to distance myself physically from the loudest adults, i.e. who drank the most.

It was as a child I promised myself that I would never assent to becoming even a social drinker. Today, I can count the number of drinks I've consumed in my 65 years on two hands and one foot. Because alcoholism runs in my family, I have always found the prospect of becoming an addict to be scary, frankly. But then, my DNA found a different substance on which to become dependent – food. **Continued....**

As that introverted and socially awkward little boy, I discovered peace and comfort through ice cream, cookies – sweets of all kinds. As I grew, I further discovered that a meal was not sufficient unless it was accompanied with a dessert or two. Interestingly, as the pounds continued to add up in my adulthood, I found myself making the same excuses I've heard from persons with addictions: "I can stop at any time." And I have stopped before. I once went fifteen years without a single sweet, and I'm now into my tenth year in my second attempt! But, of course, I have found other substitutes, so much so that I can tell you there isn't a chip or cracker or cheese I haven't tried – and frequently!

During my internship in the ministry in my mid-50s I attended Overeaters Anonymous and enjoyed losing 70 pounds during that year. Sadly, what I failed to learn was that OA is not a weight-loss program, but as with all 12-Step programs it is a life-long process from which I walked away when I thought I had my problem licked. I want to be able to explain to you that I'll be back someday, but that would involve making a promise about the future; for me, that's not living one day at a time.

I've been asked to comment on how I respond to congregants who talk to me about their addictions. Truthfully, I am honored when someone feels comfortable enough with me to admit to their compulsions. I often discover that there is a familial history of addiction in the family; relating this to the congregant gives them an opportunity to take so much of the blame off themselves. When I say, "It's in your DNA, so forgive yourself" you can see the years of shame drip off their overly burdened shoulders. And when the DNA message would not be appropriate because the addiction began for other reasons, I'm honored in the Name of God to share, "Well, you've taken that most important first step. You are here talking to me, and God is sitting in that other chair right there. This sounds like a confession to me, so know that in God you are forgiven. How does that feel?" At this point the years of guilt are shed in tears. What a release!

In short, this is my message: It took years for me to learn to love myself in God. Now, as an ordained pastor, I am called to preach the Gospel in that same God. Frankly, there are still some Sunday mornings when I find myself thinking during my proclamations "Why should these people listen to me? What kind of an example am I setting as this obese man?"

But then I remind myself that God's Grace extends to addicts of all kinds, even compulsive overeaters. And then I find myself being loved all over again.

Step Twelve

Having had a Spiritual awakening, as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

From: Alcoholics Anonymous

BE A FORCE FOR RECOVERY IN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY

Through the generosity of the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, Savannah's faith leaders participated in a day-long Virtual Family Program on October 6.

The in-depth, interactive program introduced our faith leaders to addiction and recovery as seen through the eyes of family and loved ones. Most important, the program detailed how people affected by addiction can address the disease, take care of themselves in healthy ways...and be advocates for recovery. Our Savannah faith leaders who participated said the program was immensely helpful.

If you could not attend on October 6, please know that the program is available several times each week FREE to any Savannah faith leader (family member or lay leader) who wants to participate.

Here's how to register:

Use your browser to go to: <http://www.RecoveryGo.org>

Scroll down to Virtual Family Program and click on the link to register. Within that link, you can pick the day and date that works best for you. Once you pick the day and date, follow the prompts and complete your registration.

OUR TEAMMATE COMMENTS ON WHAT SHE RE-LEARNED

By Ardra Hartz
Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition volunteer



The all-day Hazelden Betty Ford Virtual Family Program on October 6, 2020 required me to reschedule several work commitments, but the event was comprehensive, information-filled, and totally worth my time.

I lived with active alcoholism in my home for many years, always trying to keep everyone in balance. After I ultimately chose healing for myself and finding my own equilibrium, I faced and survived another go-round when one of my children became addicted.

Make no mistake about this disease, the tendency for addiction is genetically inherited. Addiction is a pathological relationship with a mind-altering substance. Today, the term many use is "substance abuse disorder". There are also addictive "process disorders" such as excessive overwork, gambling, and others.

What I had learned in the 1990's about boundaries, about detachment, about focusing on myself, I had to relearn all over again in 2018-2019. My child was ill; wasn't I supposed to be "right there to save her?"... No, I wasn't. **continued...**

Our workshop moderator told us that for every addiction sufferer, there are at least 6 others who are affected. One in ten people become addicted in spite of the consequences they suffer. Healing is possible, but there is permanent damage to certain parts of the brain.

I was reminded of the "seven C's of recovery" for people who love those who are struggling with addiction:

- * I did not cause the addiction
- * I cannot control the addiction
- * I cannot cure the addiction

However, I can learn to care for myself by:

- * Communicating my feelings
- * Making healthy choices, and
- * Connecting with others in recovery support,
such as Alanon

continued....

People affected by addiction need the understanding and support of their faith leaders just as much as the addicted do. Often the addicted person and the people they love all try to pretend that everything is OK. Denial leads to this typical pattern and I participated in it for years. That's why faith leaders need to *talk about addiction* and open the door for anyone to come speak with them confidentially. Faith community members need to know that they are in a safe environment.

I was a Realtor, among my other employment roles, and I remember my colleague saying this at a sales meeting: "Don't get caught up in trying to have every single answer for every single buyer or seller. Learn to be the source of the source." That's what faith leaders can do: become a source of support and understanding, able to direct people who are suffering to the sources of help they need right here in Savannah.

Parallel Experience



Addict/Alcoholic

- No fault / no blame disease
- Denial
- Preoccupation
- Powerless / impaired control
- Isolation
- Blackouts
- Tolerance
- Withdrawal
- Progressive
- Shame
- Poor sleep



Family Member

- No fault / no blame disease
- Denial
- Preoccupation
- Powerless / impaired control
- Isolation
- Blackouts
- Tolerance
- Withdrawal
- Progressive
- Shame
- Poor sleep

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Substance Abuse Linked

Evan was a 43-year-old father and husband. A computer programmer who went mountain biking on weekends and played basketball with his boys. He was a non-smoker who had regular health check-ups.

And yet, one morning Evan awoke next to his wife unable to move. His face was drooping, his arms weak, his speech slurred. Raced by ambulance to the nearest emergency room, Evan – a man with no apparent health risk factors – was having a stroke.

"What put Evan at increased risk for waking up with half of his body paralyzed (and for numerous other diseases) is not rare," says Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, California's Surgeon General. "It's something that two-thirds of the nation's population is exposed to. It is something so common that it's hiding in plain sight.

"What is it? It is childhood adversity."

Burke Harris wrote The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity in 2018. She was among the first American physicians to diagnose and treat the effects of ACE – Adverse Childhood Experiences – after two researchers, Dr. Vincent Felitti and Dr. Robert Anda, published their extensive study of more than 17,400 people and introduced the acronym ACE in a 1998 article for the American Journal of Preventative Medicine. In their landmark study, the doctors found that almost two-thirds of the adults reported at least one Adverse Childhood Experience.

"Children have faced trauma and stress in the form of abuse, neglect, violence and fear since God was a boy," Dr. Burke Harris writes. "Parents have been getting trashed, getting arrested and getting divorced for almost as long."

Our culture tells us that smart and strong people can rise above their pasts and triumph through self-will and resilience. But can they?

Dr. Burke Harris' conclusion is chilling:

"Twenty years of medical research has shown that childhood adversity literally gets under our skin," she says, "changing people in ways that can endure in their bodies for decades."



A Dramatic Correlation

In its spring, 2020 magazine Together, the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation concurs with Dr. Burke Harris: "The evidence continues to mount demonstrating a strong correlation between Adverse Childhood Experiences and substance use disorders in adulthood."

Dr. Stephen Delisi, a psychiatrist and Medical Director of Professional Education for Hazelden Betty Ford says this about ACE: "Simply put, exposure to trauma in childhood can have a tremendous, lasting impact on our health and the quality of our lives. As a person's ACE score increases on a scale of a zero to ten, so does the potential for developing physical, behavioral and mental health disease in adulthood. The increased risk for substance use disorders is dramatic. Compared with people who have zero ACE's, individuals with at least one ACE are two to four times more likely to start using alcohol or other drugs at an early age. A person with an ACE score of five or higher is seven to ten times more likely to experience addiction."

There is more: higher scores predict risks of depression, suicide, other chronic illnesses and a shortened life overall. Trauma can alter the structure and function of the developing brain and weaken the body's immune system.

The ACE survey is not yet a standard of care in pediatric medicine, says Dr. Stephen Delisi of Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, "but we have the evidence and the tools to do better for our children, our families and our future – now."

What is Your ACE Score?

(For each "yes" answer, add 1 to your score)

. Before your 18th birthday:

1. Did a parent/other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, put you down, humiliate you or act in a way that made you afraid you might be physically hurt?
2. Did a parent/other adult in the household often or very often push, grab, slap or throw something at you or ever hit you so hard you had marks or were injured?
3. Did an adult/person at least five years older than you ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way, or attempt or actually have oral, anal or vaginal intercourse with you?
4. Did you often or very often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special, or that your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
5. Did you often or very often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you, or that your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
7. Was your mother or stepmother often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes, often or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
10. Did a household member go to prison?

(This ACE quiz is a variation of questions asked in the original ACE study)

"It takes courage to step beyond what is comfortable, predictable, and known. Today, thanks to Alanon, I have a higher Power who is always there for me, helping me to cope with my fears and find new, effective solutions to my problems. Thus I am taken beyond the problems that once held me hostage. I am free to act, or not to act, to take a chance, or to hold off on a decision, to make choices that feel right."

Alanon book of readings: *Courage to Change*, page 219



How Children Are Affected by Addiction

When Betty Ford, the former First Lady of the United States, founded her treatment Center in southern California, she dreamed of a program for children affected by Addiction. She hired Jerry Moe to create the ground-breaking program in 1996.

Jerry Moe chats with Sesame Street's newest Muppet, Karli, whose Mom is in recovery from addiction.

Jerry has developed a presentation for Savannah's faith leaders followed by Q & A session focused on the effects of addiction on children.

Please reserve 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 EST on Tuesday,
January 12 for this valuable virtual education program.

Also, encourage some of your lay leaders to join you.

FOLLOW THIS LINK TO ATTEND JERRY'S PROGRAM : <https://emory.zoom.us/j/97320432503>

Dear Savannah Faith Leaders, we encourage you to share this e-newsletter with your peers and leaders / members of your congregation.

For more information about the Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition of Savannah, contact Carol Pine, carol@pineandpartners.com

