



## Prison Ministry

### *Yes, you should go to jail*

It's true: a pastor's primary responsibility is to his flock, the ones he has been called to shepherd and lead to the green pastures and quiet waters of the Word.

But Jesus said he would call other sheep, such as the droves who are locked up. They need to be led to those same green pastures and quiet waters. They cannot come to us; they need us to go to them.

Should a shepherd, busy tending those safely in the sheep pen, also be seeking strays in the penitentiary? Consider these ten reasons to "go directly to jail."

1) Jesus died for them, too. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

2) It could be me. Maybe you recall a sin for which you could (should?) have been arrested. You may know fellow pew sitters who once sat in a cell. Maybe you recognize these "jailbirds:" Joseph, Jeremiah, John, Jesus. Or these murderers: Moses, David, Paul. And it may happen that a son or daughter of the congregation gets in trouble, hoping to keep it secret. A pastor with prior access to jail is in the right place with the right credentials to counsel disgraced disciples.

3) Why not WELS? Other groups conduct ministry behind bars, but many dilute the pure gospel with conditions. If it sounds strange to announce "You are forgiven" to a convicted, repentant lawbreaker, recall the loving father's message to his convicted, repentant son (Luke 15:21-24).

4) They are part of the "all nations" that Jesus sent his disciples to evangelize (Matthew 28:19-20). We might refer to this ministry as our mission to "Incarceration Nation."

5) Privilege. Not all kids grow up in happy situations. Lack of loving parents, church family, and godly friends does not excuse criminal behavior, but broken homes and hopes often contribute to self-destructive choices. If you enjoy a good life, thanks in part to

circumstances of birth, realize that others were not so blessed. It is your privilege to introduce Satan's captives to the Chainbreaker.

### WELS Special Ministries

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6) Recognition. The world may not care that you care about criminals, but your Savior does. On the Last Day, the Good Shepherd will extend the invitation: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father...for I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:34,36).

7) Reformation. The same Word that brought radical change to a corrupt church can bring radical change to corrupt convicts. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation..." (2 Corinthians 5:17). No, not everyone who gets "jailhouse religion" remains on the narrow path that leads to life. Nor does every youth confirmed in your church. We teach them anyway.

8) Appreciation. The sheep in the safety of the pen don't always thank their faithful shepherd. After all, that's why they pay him. But sheep that are sinking in quicksand or dangling from a precipice may be profusely grateful for their rescue.

9) Go outside the walls. "Let us go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore" (Hebrews 13:13). Inside the church there is safety and peace. Outside there are broken lives, pain, disgrace. Jesus went outside, seeking society's failures. The mission field is not inside the walls of a church, but there is a ripe field inside the walls of a penal institution.

10) Reputation. Perhaps you fear that outreach to those in prison will result in your church being a target of derision. Remember who targeted Jesus for derision for consorting with "sinners?" The Pharisees! This ministry *will* earn you a reputation: as a church that cares about "the least of these," for you understand that grace for you means grace for them; as a ministry that sets an example of leaving your comfort zone; as a body of believers that is not afraid to get its hands dirty; as "real deal" Christians who take seriously the words: "Remember those in prison as if you were fellow prisoners..." (Hebrews 13:3).

Eager to take the next step? Contact WELS Prison Ministry at 507-354-3130 or [prisonministry@wels.net](mailto:prisonministry@wels.net). Ask about the Jail Ministry Training Team. Find more resources at [wels.net/pm](http://wels.net/pm).

If you know an inmate who would appreciate mailings from WELS Prison Ministry, submit their name and address at [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer).

*David Rosenbaum teaches at the Brevard County Jail, an outreach of Redeemer, Merritt Island, Fla.*

## Those who are forgiven much love much

"Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47 EHV). Jesus spoke those words after a woman, who is simply described as "sinful," showed the Teacher love by washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. By contrast, the Pharisee who hosted the dinner party showed no acts of love to the Savior.

Those who have been forgiven much will love much. Recently I saw this love in action at a prison.



Wanda Markland, warden of the South Dakota Women's Prison in Pierre, has done many good things for the inmates. Perhaps the greatest impact has come from introducing WELS Prison Ministry materials. Some are available to read in the library, and many can be taken for free...if the women get there fast enough. Amanda, an inmate working in the library, says that sometimes they have to fill the free rack twice or more a day with our books. Who knows how many lives have been changed by God's Word in this institution?

When asked what the books mean to her, inmate Katherine responded: "Everything." The books have enabled her to understand the Bible. Others replied that the books help them to know that they are loved, they are not alone, and they are growing in their spiritual life. One inmate was even led to request baptism.

Where there is faith in Jesus, good works are bound to follow. These women, who rejoice in the good news that they are forgiven, don't want to keep the good news to themselves. So they took up a collection from their meager funds and sent a donation to WELS Prison Ministry.

These women may not be able to wash Jesus' feet, but they are showing him much love by studying his Word and showing others much love by helping to spread the Word.

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*John Schwartz serves those who have been set free by the gospel at Redeemer, Pierre, S.D.*

# Health & Wellness

## *Is there a TBI survivor in your church?*

It shakes your faith for a more than just a moment. It makes you question why. The hurt runs so deep it takes your breath away and makes you wonder, "Could this really be part of God's plan?"

As you sit in the ICU not knowing if your daughter will live or die, comfort comes in the form of a silent hug, and you know that God is there to give you hope and strength. As her mother, you walk beside your child who has suffered a brain injury. You lean on God in a way you never imagined, praying that his power and love will strengthen you to face the impossible.

Prayer is a powerful privilege. When my daughter sustained her severe traumatic brain injury (TBI), I prayed continually to God for her recovery and boldly asked him to make her life beautiful. God answers prayers, but I needed to be patient. Faith is more than just a word or a theory. Faith is God's guide to living with, loving, and embracing someone with a brain injury.

If God had healed her suddenly, I would not have had the opportunity to walk this path with her. I would not have witnessed the miracles that God would perform in her life. I would have missed helping her face the challenges. I would not have fully understood the importance of her survival and the impact it would have on others and on me.

If there is a TBI survivor in your church, your life is one of those that will be impacted. Please take a little time to learn how to interact with them and how you can involve them in congregational life.

When such a person enters your life you may say, "She looks fine to me." Our minds can accept a disability we can see, but we struggle to comprehend and accept the unseen.



Individuals with brain injuries live with cognitive challenges. They "look fine" until they speak, act, or interact with anyone who does not know them. Too often, fear and ignorance of their condition result in judgment and assumptions.

As survivors walk through life after brain injury, each moment brings change and challenge. Each interaction presents an instance of learning and retraining. The obstacles are too numerous to mention and too complicated to explain, and they last a lifetime.

It's been 15 years since my daughter's traumatic brain injury. She has been married for four years to another TBI survivor, and they are expecting their second child. They belong to a congregation that embraces them and the gifts they bring; they serve as greeters and as an usher.

If your flock includes a TBI survivor, know that each individual brings a unique relationship into your life. Talking with them, getting to know them, and accepting the nuances are each a small part of helping them find a new path in life. Praying with them and for them brings blessing both to you and them. Find ways to use their abilities in congregational life. You will play a key role in their ongoing healing!

*Lois York-Lewis and her daughter Bari Rieth co-founded the Brain Injury Resource Center of Wisconsin, located in Waukesha. Read Bari's story at [bircofwi.org](http://bircofwi.org). Lois is a member at St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.*

## *Parish nurses minister to body and soul*

Sandy stepped into a room outside St. John's sanctuary, where parish nurses offer blood pressure screenings after Sunday worship. "Sandy," I said, removing the cuff, "your blood pressure is 144/90. Looking at your records, it's elevated. Are you taking your blood pressure pills?"

Sheepishly she replied, "I stopped taking my pills because I was feeling better. But I'll start taking the little pill in the morning and evening." Sandy is a widow and an active parishioner. She also suffers from memory problems and has a history of stroke. I emphasized the importance of taking her pills as prescribed by her doctor. This is a common conversation as a parish nurse offers education, support, and encouragement to a member of the flock.

A parish nurse (PN) is a registered nurse with specialized education to support the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of church members. The PN may provide health resources and education but does not provide medications, administer shots, start IVs, or perform any invasive procedures. Clergy corroborate the PN. As early as 1881, Lutheran General Hospital in Chicago had deaconess nurses on its staff, but it would be another century before parish nurses were given a name. Presently, hundreds of PN's serve throughout the United States in a variety of denominations. (Mary Elizabeth O'Brien, *Parish Nursing: Healthcare Ministry within the Church*, Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 2003).

Consider the benefits that a parish nurse ministry could bring to your congregation:

- Blood pressure screening, health fairs, blood drives
- Visiting shut-ins
- Health/wellness education, community resources, health advocate
- Health classes, e.g. CPR, yoga, etc.
- Bereavement support groups (St. John uses GriefShare)
- First aid kits, AED (automated external defibrillator) checks
- Encouragement and prayer support

Parish nursing can also be an outreach ministry. Non-members can be invited to classes and programs facilitated by the PN. Attending to a person's physical health can bring benefits for their spiritual health.



If you are a Christian nurse, prayerfully consider using your medical wisdom to minister at church. If you are already a PN, continue to depend on the Holy Spirit to guide and bless your service. If you have benefited from such a ministry, please express your gratitude and pray for your parish nurse.

*A. Heidi Gilbert-Then is one of five parish nurses at St. John, Lannon, Wis. Since 2015, they have been providing education, implementing programs, and showing compassion to members of the congregation and the community, all with the full support of their pastors.*

*To learn more about starting a parish nurse program, visit [csm.welsrc.net/parish-nurses](http://csm.welsrc.net/parish-nurses).*

## *From a heart of stone to a heart of flesh*

During my evening shift at our local hospital, I attempted to visit 66-year-old Richard. I introduced myself as the hospital's volunteer chaplain and offered to visit. To my surprise he vigorously gestured for me to leave, saying: "I don't want to see any chaplain." Then he took a second look and asked, "Jude, is that you, the CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) member that I knew from years ago?" He invited me back into his world but refused any prayer or Scripture. I visited him weekly until he was well enough to return home.

A month later the hospital's director of chaplains called. The family wanted me to know that Richard was not likely to live beyond the week. I saw him that day and followed up each day that week. I had the privilege of journeying with him through the valley of the shadow of death.

Richard spent his life helping others; he was spending his final days being helped by others.

He endeavored to beat cancer, but it beat him. It humbled a fiercely independent man who always had to have things his way, a stubborn man with a heart of stone.

Tearfully, he told me that the previous week he had entered the hospital chapel to pray, to surrender his life to Christ. He realized that he could no longer control his life and collapsed in the arms of his Savior, who had been pursuing him his whole life.

God used Richard's physical sickness of leukemia to heal his spiritual sickness of sin.

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Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (42:3).

God says in Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (36:26). "For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" (18:32).

Richard did repent and was born again in that hospital chapel. Meanwhile, in heaven's chapel, "...there is more rejoicing...over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7).

This once lost, now found sinner wrote a testimony that revealed his changed heart toward his wife and his life. He was moved to tears of joy, mingled with tears of repentance, every time he heard his Christian wife's voice. Julia had made a commitment to her husband, for better or worse, and had kept that commitment for 43 years, despite many difficulties. He was overwhelmed with her legacy of undeserved love, like that of his Savior.

At Julia's request, I conducted Richard's funeral service, where those who had come to mourn heard of the joy that awaits those who repent and turn to Christ.

*Jude Peck is a member at Hope, Irmo, S. C. He serves as a volunteer hospital chaplain and a paid hospice chaplain in the Columbia area. To learn more about WELS chaplain certification, visit [wels.net/chaplains](http://wels.net/chaplains).*

# Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities Ministry

## *A scary problem*

Kristen is a member of the church I serve. Every Sunday she tells me that my sermons are interesting and that she really likes me “as a friend.” She often gets excited that our birthdays are in the same month. Partially due to her autism, she never tires of saying nice things to me.

Of course, Kristen’s autism also causes her difficulties. One such difficulty is that loud noises scare her. For this reason, Good Friday was her least favorite church service of the year. That service concludes with the *strepitus*, a loud sound that signifies the closing of Jesus’ tomb. That sound caused Kristen to become very upset, not only on Good Friday, but any time she remembered it.

After her parents told me about this problem, I decided that it wasn’t worth causing her distress. I told the man who usually performs the *strepitus* that we would eliminate it. Then his wife suggested that Kristen might not be afraid of the noise if she made it herself. When first asked, Kristen wasn’t sure that she wanted to. But she gave it a try, striking the tympani with a mallet. From that moment forward, she couldn’t wait for Good Friday service! And she started telling me something new on Sunday mornings: that *she* was going to make the noise that scares *me* on Good Friday!

How might you involve members with special needs at your congregation, so that they can become as excited as Kristen about serving their Lord?

*John Derme speaks loud words from the pulpit that scare the devil every Sunday at Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, Nev.*

## *Special Olympics: An outreach opportunity*

When I arrived in Wasilla, Alaska, in 2012, I was in for quite a culture shock. Both inside and outside the church, things were different than in Wisconsin. I was used to a larger congregation where most of your time as a pastor was spoken for.

Here, with a smaller flock to shepherd, I looked for ways to get involved in the community. I discovered that Special Olympics can offer opportunities for outreach, both to the intellectually disabled competitors and their families.

I found my niche as the head coach of bocce ball. Leveraging that influence, I made sure that the outside courts were built in the community park near me. An inside turf court was, likewise, close by. The first year I had to travel farther and become known, but my views gradually began to carry more weight.



Many community organizations need volunteers to serve on boards and committees. Getting involved has connected me to people that I could invite to my church. That led to including them in a bell choir that performs in the church and community. Each bell choir practice begins with snacks and a Bible story from the “Dear Christian Friend” curriculum from Jesus Cares Ministries. We now count six members at King of Kings who stem from that Special Olympics connection.

If you are interested, do some groundwork. Visit [specialolympics.org](http://specialolympics.org) to read about this movement for inclusion that began in 1968. Consider how the principle of including people with disabilities matches the mission of the church. Under the “Stories” tab, find some inspiring accounts to share. Under the “Get Involved” tab, see what is happening in your area.

Discuss the possibilities for outreach with your church council and/or evangelism committee. Ask your members to consider the positive effects on the congregation and in the community if you were to invite people with special needs and make them feel welcome.

Get advice from Jesus Cares Ministries on starting a “Jesus Cares” class for the intellectually disabled. Contact Joel Gaertner ([jpgaertner@tlha.org](mailto:jpgaertner@tlha.org)) or click on the “Jesus Cares Ministries” tab at [tlha.org](http://tlha.org).

Caution #1: This ministry could easily consume more time and effort than you are prepared for. Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Take it slow at first. Recruit other people to assist you.

Caution #2: Many events take place on Sundays, at least in my community. Can you afford to miss one or more Sundays a year, even for such a worthy cause? Our team has an assistant coach who fills in until I can get there after church. Telling your team and their families that worship comes first can make an important statement about faith and priorities.

In Luke 14:15-24, the Master tells us to go to the streets and alleys and roads and country lanes to find more guests for the wedding banquet. Might Special Olympics be one of those places for you to look?

*When he's not playing bocce ball, Robb Robbert serves all the special saints at King of Kings, Wasilla, Alaska.*

## Visually Impaired

### *Blindness opens a man's eyes*

Jeremiah was working on the drive shaft of his truck when the vehicle rolled backward, crushing his upper body and head and pinning him underneath. Miraculously, first responders were able to free him and transport him to the hospital.

After two weeks in a coma, Jeremiah opened his eyes to see... nothing. After almost 40 years of sight, Jeremiah couldn't see even a flicker of light. Two more weeks in the hospital and several surgeries later, he returned home. He had survived, but his eyesight had not.

Believing friends and family members had shared the good news of Jesus with Jeremiah prior to his accident. At the time, that message seemed like foolishness to him. But gospel seeds had been planted, and the Holy Spirit was working on his stony heart.

When Jeremiah awoke from his coma, he talked about getting baptized. God created a hunger for the Word and opened his eyes to the truth as Jeremiah listened to the Bible on his smart phone. Questions about the Lord were suddenly numerous. A friend brought him to Bible information class, where he's been learning the essential truths of the Scriptures.

After a couple months of study, Jeremiah asked if he and his two girls could be baptized. On September 14, 2019, dad and daughters, ages 9 and 14, were reborn into God's family, washed with water through the Word. The sisters have joined their father in learning the stories of God's grace in the Bible.

Before Jeremiah lost his sight, he ran a successful contracting business, was an avid hunter and outdoorsman, and was a critic of Christ. His construction work is limited now, although he still manages some of his own home repairs. Friends even help him to enjoy some hunting.

But the biggest change in Jeremiah's life is his attitude toward Jesus. By his grace, the Lord turned his child away from the darkness of unbelief and brought him into the light of faith. The accident had left him blind, yet Jeremiah could finally see that he and his family needed a Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He has gained 20/20 vision that Jesus Christ is that Savior. And he knows that his blindness is temporary, for when he reaches heaven he will gaze on all the glory of his Redeemer.

*"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an*

*inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).*

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*Jesse Johnston is pastor at Mt. Calvary, Menasha, Wis., where he sees God working in the lives of people like Jeremiah.*

*WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired ([wels.net/mvi](http://wels.net/mvi)) makes Christian resources available free of charge to anyone who is visually impaired or has a disability that prevents them from reading a book.*

## Deaf and Hard of Hearing

### *"Can you say that again?"*

How many in your congregation wear hearing aids? How many keep asking "What?" over and over? How many deaf people in your community stay home on Sundays because they do not know of a church that can meet their needs?

If you are not deaf or hard of hearing, you may not think much about those who are. Even if you are aware of their needs, you may not know how to address them. This disability is invisible, but for those who are afflicted, it poses a huge barrier to the Word.

"Ministering to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing" is a new resource that offers insights and practical advice to those who want to better serve this population. Find it at [welscongregationalervices.net/c011](http://welscongregationalervices.net/c011). It includes a video interview for leaders to watch, as well as a downloadable document that answers many of the questions congregations have.

### **Hand in Hand with WELS Special Ministries**

To learn more about WELS Special Ministries or donate to Special Ministries projects, visit [wels.net/special-ministries](http://wels.net/special-ministries).

To subscribe to the email version of *His Hands*, visit [wels.net/subscribe](http://wels.net/subscribe).

To refer military personnel, prisoners, or people with developmental disabilities for Special Ministries resources, visit [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer).

This module can help churches make worship, Bible study, and other activities more accessible to people with hearing loss. It may also foster outreach to your deaf or hard of hearing neighbors who might be led to rejoice, "Finally...a church that cares about me!"

## Online classes in Spring 2020

The following online classes will be offered through Martin Luther College during the Spring semester, January 8 to May 8, 2020. Go to: [mlc-wels.edu](http://mlc-wels.edu) and click on "Academics," then "Continuing Education."

### **ASL8001 – American Sign Language and Introduction to Deaf Culture 3 credits**

The basic foundation of American Sign Language through an overview of deaf culture and an introduction to the signing of finger spelling, numbers, colors, vocabulary words, and beginning-level conversations.

### **THE9522 – Chaplaincy Issues and Fieldwork 3 credits**

An overview of chaplaincy, related issues, and fieldwork experience in a specific area of chaplain ministry.

### **THE9523 – Ministering to the Incarcerated and Their Families 3 credits**

Strategies to initiate and implement a gospel ministry to the incarcerated.

### **THE9524 – Frontline Chaplaincy 3 credits**

A study of the challenges faced by the protectors of society (military, law enforcement, fire service) and the information chaplains need to minister to them.

### **THE9534 – Grounded in Scripture 3 credits**

An introduction to theology that focuses upon the scriptural teachings of special importance to chaplaincy ministry.

children. That shocking statistic was shared by Victor Vieth at "Promise to Protect," a seminar on making churches and schools safe places for children. Some 75 lay leaders, teachers, and pastors from fifteen WELS churches and schools attended the event at Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colo., in August 2019.

Victor Vieth, a WELS member and former prosecutor, gained national recognition for addressing child abuse in rural Minnesota. He has trained thousands of child-protection professionals on child abuse investigation, prosecution, and prevention. In 2017 he earned an MA in theology from Wartburg Seminary.

While many do not see churches as safe spaces, predators view them as easy targets. Vieth explained: "Sex offenders report that Christians are extremely trusting and easy to manipulate. Sex offenders who grew up in a church body are given the most slack and are rarely suspected of nefarious conduct. Since they often select children who may have already endured trauma or have behavioral issues, it is easy for sex offenders to convince the church that the child is not telling the truth. Without better education, faith leaders and parishioners will continue to be easily fooled by child molesters."

As believers, our motivation to protect children comes from our Savior. "In contrast to the ethos of his time, Jesus said that children were messengers from God and how we treat children reflects our attitude toward God (Mark 9:36-37). In the Gospels, Jesus harshly rebuked anyone who would hurt a child (Matthew 18:6-9). Some scholars believe this was a specific condemnation of child sexual abuse. Jesus scolded his followers for keeping children away from him (Mark 10:13-16) and promised to cast aside religious leaders who turned a blind eye to those who are suffering (Matthew 25:45)."

Lay leaders, teachers, and pastors agreed that 1) it was eye-opening that so many have suffered sexual abuse within churches, and 2) the seminar was very helpful for making crucial changes in their schools and churches. Mr. Vieth distributed sample policies and encouraged every congregation and school to implement a robust Youth and Child Protection Policy. He cautioned that policies produced by insurance companies or law firms may have different goals.

Although the church has fallen short on this issue, Vieth sees reason for optimism. "Across the country, I increasingly encounter church leaders eager to learn more about child abuse and to minister compassionately to those who are hurting. We need to nurture and grow this faithful remnant until the church is once again a powerful force in the fight against child abuse and neglect."

*Tim Spiegelberg is pastor at Carbon Valley Lutheran Church, Firestone, Colo.*

*Visit [welscongregationalservices.net/c003](http://welscongregationalservices.net/c003) to learn about "Standing Up for Children: A Christian Response to Child Abuse and Neglect."*

*Freedom for the Captives is a WELS ministry to protect children and empower abuse survivors. Their website is [freedomforcaptives.com](http://freedomforcaptives.com).*

## Mental Health Needs

### *Promising to protect the children*

Approximately ten percent of Protestants below age 35 and about one-third of Catholics have either left the church or contemplated leaving because they do not see the church as a safe place for



## Five myths about ministering to people with addictions

With an estimated 19.7 million Americans having a substance use disorder (SUD), it is very likely that your church needs to minister to someone affected by an SUD this Sunday. Are you ready?

Being ready means having the facts. Here are five myths every church needs to be aware of when preparing to minister to those with SUDs.

### **MYTH: Addiction is a problem outside the church.**

Wild and profligate living is not the only path to an SUD. The statistics suggest that SUDs can affect anyone from any background or walk of life. Ministering to those with SUDs may mean ministering to our closest friends, relatives, and even our pastors.

### **MYTH: If I am not a recovering alcoholic or addict, I cannot help.**

Those of us in the recovery community are partially to blame for the popularity of this myth. We like to repeat the maxim that only an alcoholic can help an alcoholic. But empathy and a willingness to help are more important than shared experience. That is why doctors, teachers, employers, parents, friends, and the church can help.

### **MYTH: Addicts are in denial.**

Another myth is that people with SUDs need to be confronted to break through their denial. In truth, many individuals want help. Even those who are not immediately ready to accept treatment often have both reasons to quit and reasons to continue to use. Be ready to listen without judgment to both sets of reasons. Judgment-free listening actually helps people accept the need for help more quickly than confrontation.

### **MYTH: Abstinence is the only goal.**

Even if a person is not ready to give up substances entirely, they may be ready to cut back. Studies suggest that many of those who are willing to reduce their use now will eventually choose total abstinence. We shouldn't dismiss small steps in the right direction. So do not assume that the next step for someone with an SUD must be complete abstinence. Instead, encourage any behavior that reduces the harm created by SUDs.

### **MYTH: Assume you don't have a problem.**

Drinking runs along a continuum from "low risk" to "high risk." Many individuals drink far beyond what is considered healthy by the medical community and may be at risk for various health and wellness issues. To learn more about what the medical profession considers safe drinking and for tips on how to cut back or quit, see this publication: [niaaa.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Rethinking\\_Drinking.pdf](http://niaaa.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Rethinking_Drinking.pdf)

Your church can help those with SUDs. All they need to do is have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5-8). This means having the humility to

admit that anyone in your congregation could have an SUD. It means being empathetic and willing to help. It means listening and avoiding confrontation. It means encouraging even small steps toward sobriety. Finally, it means being willing to consider if one's own use has become a problem.

*Jason Jonker is the founder of Lutheran Recovery Ministries' Recovery Retreat. Contact him at [resilient@crosswalkphoenix.com](mailto:resilient@crosswalkphoenix.com).*

## Addiction recovery, Lutheran style

Have you ever wished there was a distinctly Lutheran approach to recovery from drugs and alcohol? Or that you could find a like-minded group of Christians with whom to share your struggles and triumphs? Recovery Retreat, designed by Lutheran Recovery Ministries, promises all that! Mark your calendar for February 20-23, 2020, in Phoenix, Ariz.

This retreat is for the whole church to celebrate Jesus' power over addiction. There will be sharing groups, breakout sessions, and inspiring speakers such as Pastor Mark Jeske.

- For those in recovery, it will be an opportunity to strengthen your connection to Christ and exchange support with others walking that path.
- For the family members of those who struggle with addiction, it will be an opportunity to pray with and gather strength from others who are facing the same struggles.
- For pastors and lay leaders, it will be an opportunity to learn how your church can better minister to the 19.7 million Americans with a substance use disorder and their families.

Last year's attendees raved about the fellowship, the weather, and the healthy, homemade Mexican and American meals.

It all happens February 20-23, 2020, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery, 8502 W. Pinchot Avenue, Phoenix, Ariz. Register at [lutheranrecoveryministries.com/registration](http://lutheranrecoveryministries.com/registration).