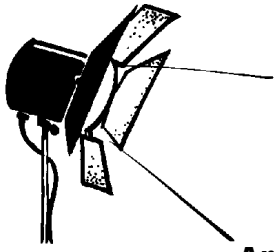
The Proactive Pulse



Are We Really Living What we Profess?

(Part I of II)

Are we really living what we profess in reaching out to a variety of Twelve Step Groups in our churches?

Many congregations have one or more "Twelve Step" groups that meet in their buildings, but there is often a minimal connection between the "church family" and the "Twelve Step families" which meet consistently. We have all heard comments about this.

From church leaders, "I know they meet in our building but they are anonymous and don't want us to have any contact with them. It's a private group."

From the Twelve Step members, "Organized church? No thanks. The last thing I need is a list of rules and a diet of condemnation."

A little truth can harm an amazing opportunity for potential, authentic friendships! While a *minority* of church leaders and participants in Twelve Step groups hold the attitudes above, there is enough assumption going on to keep the separation consistent in most places.

Are these Twelve Step groups anonymous? Yes. Does this mean that they don't welcome anyone who is not a "official member" of their group? No. Is what takes place in these groups confidential and are they a safe place for persons to come and share their pain and struggles? Yes. People are welcome at many of the Twelve Step groups, unless they are designated "closed groups" in which persons in them have built very deep relationships over a long period of time. (Not most Twelve Step Groups…)

None of this means that leaders and those in ministry in the church could not become authentic friends with those in AA, NA, OA or other Twelve Step programs! This can happen. What would prevent it from either the Twelve Step side or the Church side?

- Attitudes that carry negative stereotypes, about either "judgmental church folk" **or** "those struggling with addictions who have repeatedly failed"
- An unwillingness to learn and practice how to initiate and pursue authentic friendships grounded in the unconditional love of Jesus Christ
- Being unwilling to be the one or group to initiate this kind of possibility thinking and living through the grace and unconditional love of Christ

What if the church were to provide one of it's excellent covered dish meals and specifically invite the folks from one or more of the Twelve Step Groups to join them in a FELLOWSHIP dinner. This would be to simply greet, meet and eat. *No hidden agendas. No church commercials.* This would be a simple invitational step to start new friendships on common ground – good food & fellowship with each other – hearing something of one another's stories and journeys with appreciation and encouragement. The verse that comes to mind is Jeremiah 29:11.

Another very practical possibility would be to have some of the church's most open and caring *leaders* actually attend some of the Twelve Step meetings that are held in the church. This is a great way to understand more about the power of these groups and the wonderful witness to honest sharing of hearts and lives taking place in them. (Continued on Page 3)

IF your church has made meaningful and caring "relational connections" between your staff, leaders, or members WITH those in Twelve Step programs which meet in your church – please contact Rev. Jim Hollis, Executive Director of Proactive Ministries in one of the following ways: Email: pem1jwh@gmail.com; Phone: Offices (770) 803-9988; or Facebook: Jim W. Hollis or Proactive Ministries Group.

Meeting People Where They Are With The Love of Christ

May/June 2011

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Are we living what we profess when we encounter hurtful and divisive conflict in the church family?

Several of our Staff were in a church and met with a group of key leaders for conversation. When we asked the question, "What areas would you really like to improve in the ministries of the church?" - a group that had been fairly lively went silent and still. The air grew heavy. The tension in the room became so thick that it could have been sliced with a butter knife. The conflict cloud had descended.

Later, after the meeting, three people took us individually to the side and whispered the problem, "It's our secretary. She is absolutely a disaster. But she is related to a number of key giving families in the church so no one has the nerve to bring up the subject. We asked Pastor about it and he told us that he was not touching that."

Here is an example of one of those all to familiar struggles representing how we continue to *accept the unacceptable in the church*. There will be a story with this problem. Often times it goes like this:

- She's divorced and really needs the money to make her house payments
- If we cause a stir about this, her other relatives could decide to leave
- She may retire in another two or three years – *surely!*

Jesus Christ modeled for us how to address issues while loving the people struggling with them. He said to the woman caught in adultery, "I don't condemn you, go and sin no more." He set her free from a premature death through practicing loving grace – yet still addressed the issue as something that was greatly preventing her from living the life which God desired for her. *Most churches could benefit greatly from training in Healthy Conflict Ministry.*

Starting this kind of discussion must being with serious prayers for spiritual discernment. Pray for grace and the courage to put the pieces all on top of the table, in the open, with all involved. Listen to the person's feelings – often, they know their circumstance is a miserable one and may be living in fear that someone will want them gone. The grace perspective gives us much more latitude in ministry than to either ignore it and be angry OR terminate this person. The grace perspective frees us to enter into the struggle and consider all possibilities for helping the person experience others who will be honest but clear, caring and compassionate, as well as willing to help them consider improving or helping them find something else. If this person needs financial support, pray about that!

Lovingly confronting and working through conflict is so important in a faith community – it is one of the most amazing ways we can minister to each other in ways totally different than the secular world, which often says, "You don't make the cut – hit the street, you're gone! Don't take it personally."

To *not* be honest and name the problem in a respectful, caring way is to often keep the negativity and conflict alive and well – allowing it to continue to harm more and more persons in the community. This often occurs through something referred to as, "Triangling" in relationships.

Person A is angry with Person C. It may be an isolated incident or something that has been going on for a long time. So person A goes to Person B and says, "You just can't believe how ridiculous Person C is around here. She is not doing her job, causing the Pastor and other Staff enormous frustration and embarrassment and no one will do anything about it! We are losing visiting families over it."

At this point in the exchange, Person A has laid a *perfect trap* for Person B to get "Triangled." Should Person B reply by saying, "Yes I agree. That's a mess!" – then Person A immediately counts Person B as an emotional ally and continues to spread the poison. Should Person B choose to not agree, but disagree with Person A, then Person B will be placed on the "them list" in the conflict between "us and them" counting Person B as an enemy who they will need to see from then on as a hostile presence.

What other choice does Person B have when confronted by Person A with this accusation and ensuing "case" against Person C? Person B could simply say to Person A, "Wow. You certainly have some conflict with Person C. I hear your great frustration and anger. Have you ever gone directly to Person C and brought this up with them?" Person A says, "Are you kidding? NO way am I doing that. I just wanted you to know so you could do something about it. And by the way, please consider this confidential between you and me."

At that point, Person B could say to Person A, "Then if you don't want to go alone, I would be glad to go with you in order to help you work this out with Person C. And, keeping this confidential is not going to help anyone." Follow that with what some people would consider as the worst-case-scenario.

Person A says, "I am not doing that either. I just want to keep telling people what an enormous problem this is so someone will do something about it."

Then Person B could simply say to Person A, "This is simply going to be less than the best way, as outlined in Matthew 18. Please pray about this. My offer still remains. Would you like to read this scripture with me?"

Learning, understanding and practicing ***healthy conflict*** in local churches represents an enormous need across America today. If pastors, staff members and leaders were versed and experienced in practicing this, congregational life would improve by leaps and bounds. It can happen in your church.

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

Are We Really Living What We Profess?

Twelve Step Groups (Continued from Page 1)

There is not one of us without struggles in our lives. The principles and "Twelve Steps" taught in the groups could positively influence in our finding new hope in those areas.

There is SO much that Twelve Steps groups can teach the churches. So many in these groups have a very strong faith to share, with street credit. And there is so much potential blessing in how the church can love those in Twelve Step programs, letting them see that there are church folk who are Christ followers, loving others unconditionally and consistently – while also battling with *plenty* our own life issues.

Should any number of us be willing to risk being completely real – this could become an amazingly rich frontier of friendship in our lives!

Ministry Insight: Who is one group in nearly every congregation that truly struggles and deeply hurts consistently – but finds it almost impossible to share their pain? *Adults with grown children in crisis* is a silent, suffering group of individuals or families in local churches. This group can represent a significant percentage of active members and leaders. Should your church decide to start a support & encouragement group for this group, be sure to schedule a large meeting space.

Proactive Ministries Prayer Requests:

Please keep the following areas of ministry development in your daily prayers as God leads us in building friendships and ministry relationships on several new Frontiers –

- Sharing ministry with laity leaders, pastors and conference leaders in the Desert Southwest Conference of the UMC
- Sharing new friendships established in the Pacific Northwest Conference with pastors and laity in Seattle, WA
- Building on meaningful, shared vision for ministry development with several Conference leaders of the Oregon-Idaho Conference of the UMC
- Launching a new Barnabas Ministry Group with five congregations in the Griffin District of the North Georgia Conference of the UMC soon
- Working with Conference Leadership, Districts and pastors in the Florida Conference of the UMC to launch a new Barnabas Ministry Group of five churches, in the Orlando District
- Establishing a new Barnabas Ministry Group with a group of congregations in the Raleigh-Durham area of the North Carolina Conference of the UMC
- Establishing one or more new Barnabas Ministry Groups (of up to five churches each) from within a Covenant Group of seventeen churches in the South Carolina Conference of the UMC
- Three single churches that are making decisions to work with Proactive Ministries over the coming three months

Our Calendar

May

3-4 Staff Retreat
St. John UMC, Atlanta, GA

9-11 Envisioning
Emanuel UMC, Burlington, NC

12 District Training (Clergy & Laity)
Griffin UMC, Griffin, GA

13-15 Worship Ministry
Julia A Porter UMC, Porterdale, GA

15 Homecoming
County Line UMC, Acworth, GA

16 Pastor Coaching Day
Houston, TX

17 Executive Committee Meeting
Proactive Ministries

20-22 Friends in Faith Training
Tavares FUMC, Tavares, FL

24-25 Connect Group
Barnabas Cluster Project, Atlanta, GA

30 Office Closed in Observance of
Memorial Day

June

14-17 North GA Annual Conference
Athens, GA

21 Executive Committee Meeting
Proactive Ministries

24-26 Nominations & Leadership Development
Beaumont FUMC, Beaumont, TX

July

4 Office Closed in Observance of
Independence Day

19 Executive Committee Meeting
Proactive Ministries

For Our Complete Calendar, and more, visit our website:
www.proactive-ministries.org

Find us on the World Wide Web at:
www.proactive-ministries.org

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OUR NEWS

Authentic Witnesses

One of the greatest questions asked across America today is, "Are those who profess to be Christians authentic?" For us who are Christians a parallel question is, "Are we living what we profess?"

In this issue, we address two areas in which we could truly enhance our ministry in many of our churches— building friendships with those in Twelve Step Groups and moving toward the practice of healthy conflict in churches. Both of these are potential, largely unexplored ministry frontiers. Enjoy & reflect…

Rev. Jim Hollis

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