

Is your church engaged with an addiction/recovery ministry?

Simple question for you and your church. Are you currently hosting or running an addiction/recovery ministry? If the answer is yes...congratulations! If the answer is no...can I ask why not? This is an issue that affects every corner of our state no matter if you are a rural church, like the one I grew up in (We had TWO stop lights) or in a city with FOUR, SIX or EIGHT lanes of traffic. This may be a great opportunity to provide a meaningful ministry to the community. Here are a few practical ideas to start the conversation to see if this might be a good fit.

With this growing need for people in all of our communities, we should at least be exploring and be open to the possibility that an important ministry field might be right outside your church's front doors...and most likely sitting in your sanctuary during worship. I can hear the responses already, "We would know if someone had those issues here already". My guess is there are lots of churches that would be surprised at who might benefit from such a ministry of people both in their churches and in the community. Another voice I hear is, "Won't that cost a lot of money to start, we just don't have that much?" Here are some great ways to offer this ministry without breaking the bank.

Is there really a need for this type of ministry? **ABSOLUTELY!**

Whether its prescription drug misuses like painkillers (opioids) and tranquilizers, alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, etc...there are needs in our community and the church can be a great resource to serve these individuals and families. Let's look at a few things you can do to determine if this ministry might be a fit for your faith community.

1. Do some research about your community and see if you are recognizing any reoccurring themes that might show you that there is a real need for this type of ministry. Are you seeing similar headlines in the news or on Facebook that involve an increase in crime or arrest involving drug use? Is there a high number of alcohol related car crashes, overdose incidences and/or DUI arrests? Is the health department sending out public notices to make community aware of an increase of certain behaviors? Are other churches getting an increased amount of calls or request that involve needs that might have a connection to addiction/recovery issues?
2. Have a conversation with someone who has a connection to an addiction or recovery personal story. This may be a church member who has been open about their walk-in recovery. You could always set up a meeting with a reputable group that is already providing this type of service to the community to learn more information. Groups like N/A and AA and many others do amazing work and can be a great resource. Ask them about the work that they do and what are the needs in the community where the church can help. Do they need space? Physical donations? Community connections?
3. Does the congregation have a passion to serve those struggling with addiction and recovery? This doesn't mean that everyone needs to be on fire for this ministry, but there should be a commitment from the church that this ministry is important. This will also be a pivotal point to decide if the church will provide space to other community ministries to operate in the church as a rental space for groups like NA and AA or if they will launch their own ministry. If you choose the latter and wish to create your own ministry, I urge you to start very small and simple and find someone with a professional background with these issues to help lead this ministry as a facilitator or leadership role.

4. Can you provide a dedicated space for this ministry? Look at your facility to find a secure comfortable room for this group to meet. Groups like NA, AA, etc... value the opportunity to meet in a space that can allow their participants to blend in and enter without a spotlight or fanfare. Sometimes this might be a room near a side entrance or near a stairwell to be on another level that is slightly out of the way to the main traffic flow. Making sure that there is a consistent place to meet on a regular basis helps provide the stability that is so needed in many of these amazing programs that can help serve our community.
5. Don't let it stop there. Are we educating the church about these challenges facing our communities? Can we do more? What if we teach more about the situations facing our neighbors and neighborhoods? What if we collected sheets, socks, underwear etc...for a local mission that often serves those facing addiction/recovery issues? Can we bring together other churches, community leaders, schools, etc... to start dialoguing about what is happening in our communities and what resources are available? Could you bring together those who are proud of their recovery journey to share their experiences with others and hopefully share their experiences?

These are just a few ideas to get a conversation started about addiction/recovery ministries and if they are right for your church. Does it sound worth exploring? Are you excited about the possibilities? You should be if it seems like a good fit for you and your church. This is ministry and it can help change lives!



A few words of warning as you explore these exciting ministries. If you are doing this to gain more people in your church attendance or looking to get people in the door so that you can give them a condo pitch about Jesus in exchange for utilizing the space...**please stop reading now!** This is the wrong approach. Instead, try opening the doors and creating space for ministry to happen. Be warm and hospitable while respecting participants' privacy. Keep the building secure but accessible when inviting these groups into the church.

Make sure that leaders and/or facilitators are on sight and managing the group as they enter and exit the facility. Having outside groups provide a modest donation to use the space is important. It allows them to be somewhat autonomous while in the building and comfortable reaching a wide variety of individuals from different faith backgrounds and those who don't identify with any religion at all. If you want these individuals to know they are invited to worship, please leave a sign in the room with worship times as a way of offering a soft invitation to those who may be searching for something more.

Now is the time to go. Start the research, start the conversations and decide if this journey might be right for your congregation. It will not be for everyone but keep exploring ministry opportunities until you find something that might be right for your faith community.