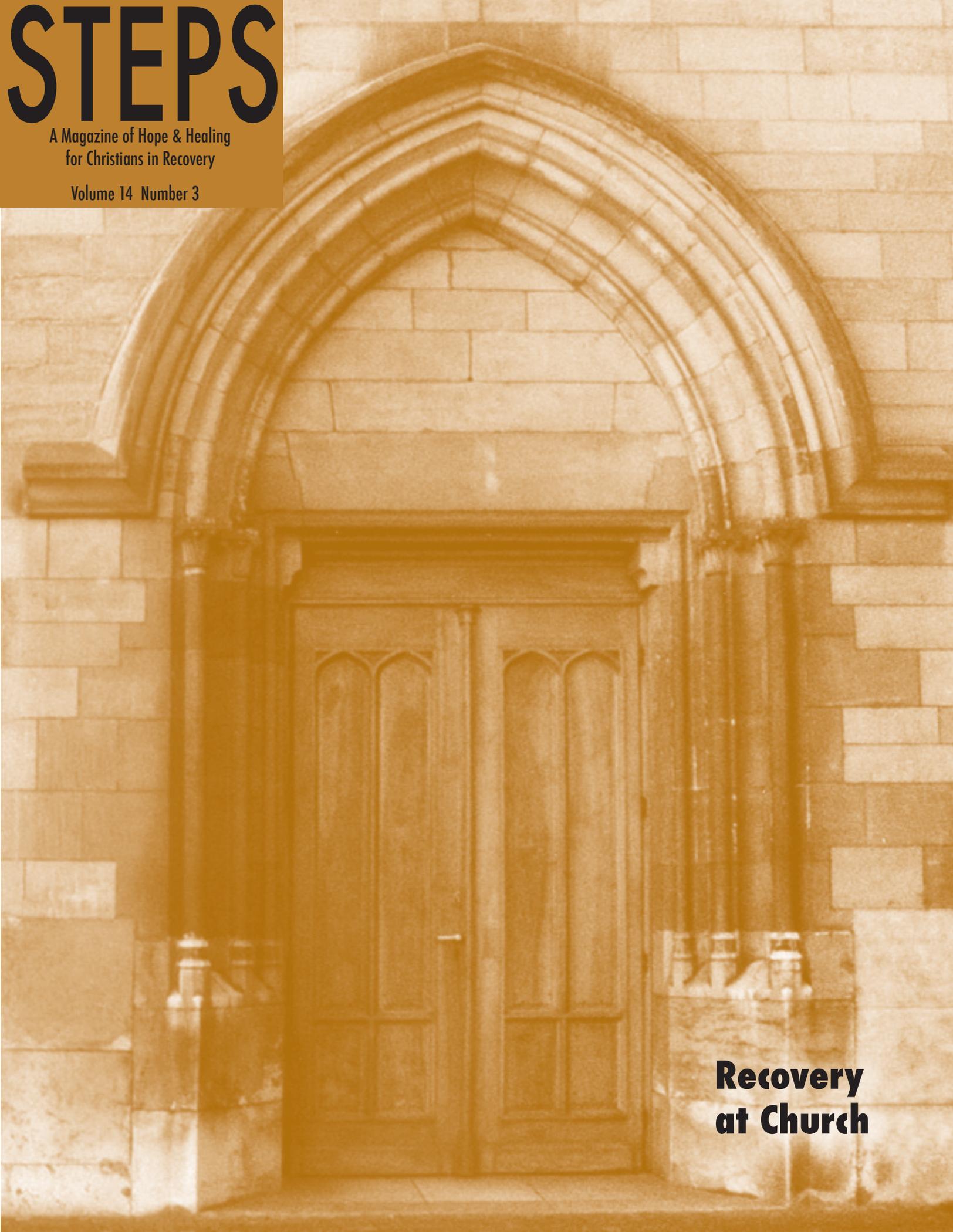


# STEPS

A Magazine of Hope & Healing  
for Christians in Recovery

Volume 14 Number 3



**Recovery  
at Church**

# CONTENTS



- 2 Beyond Anonymous
- 3 To Our Readers  
Recovering at Church  
by Dale Ryan
- 4 Doing Recovery at Church  
An interview with Rev. Jo Campe
- 9 Clergy Recovery Network  
Why Is Spirituality So Hard for Pastors?  
by Dale O. Wolery
- 10 When You Are Ready to Try Again  
Going Back to Church  
by Jeff VanVonderen
- 14 So I Stay Near The Door  
by Sam Shoemaker
- 15 Illumination  
Theological Education and Recovery  
by Dale Ryan

---

Church. For some of us, church was the place where we first started to get better. For others of us, church has been part of the problem. There are still churches that are helpful. And churches that aren't. So that hasn't changed. And probably won't change in the future. But a lot *has* changed. There are now churches that have developed remarkably comprehensive recovery programs—more comprehensive than anything available anywhere else in society. That is a very exciting development, and in this issue of STEPS we look at several topics related to developing recovery ministry in the church context. Enjoy.



He said you were the problem.



Before we explore that, I'm wondering if you would be willing to make a contribution to our building fund.



Of course, it's not the real me you are interviewing. The real me is 29 and wears a size 8.

STEPS is a publication of  
The National Association for Christian Recovery.  
Visit our web site at [www.christianrecovery.com](http://www.christianrecovery.com).

Vol. 14, No. 3

Executive Director: Dale S. Ryan  
Associate Editor: Barbara Milligan

ISSN 1099-5412

Contributing Editors:

Mark Laaser. Mark is an author and therapist and the executive director and cofounder of the Christian Alliance for Sexual Healing ([www.faithfulandtrueministries.com](http://www.faithfulandtrueministries.com)).

Patrick Means. Pat is a well-known author and speaker and a former executive director of the NACR.

Juanita Ryan. Juanita is a therapist in private practice in Brea, California. She is an author, speaker, poet and frequent contributor to STEPS.

Linda Sibley. Linda is the Director of Resources and Training for Confident Kids ([www.confidentkids.com](http://www.confidentkids.com)), a ministry to children from homes impacted by addiction, abuse, neglect, divorce or other kinds of trauma.

Jeff VanVonderen. Jeff is a well-known author and speaker and the executive director of Spiritual Abuse Recovery Resources ([www.spiritualabuse.com](http://www.spiritualabuse.com)) and Innervention ([www.innervention.com](http://www.innervention.com)).

Dale Wolery. Dale, a former executive director of the NACR, is the executive director of the Clergy Recovery Network ([www.clergyrecovery.com](http://www.clergyrecovery.com)).

NACR Membership Information:

General membership in the NACR includes STEPS and other member services and costs \$30 per year. [In Canada, US\$40. Countries other than U.S. or Canada: US\$50.00. Please send U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank, or an international money order.] Send address changes to: NACR, P.O. Box 215, Brea, CA 92822-0215. Voice: 714-529-NACR(6227). Fax: 714-529-1120.

For writers' guidelines please see [www.nacronline.com/dox/guidelines.shtml](http://www.nacronline.com/dox/guidelines.shtml). Send letters to the editor or requests to reprint material to: Editor, STEPS, P.O. Box 215, Brea, CA 92822-0215.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®, Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The opinions expressed in STEPS do not necessarily reflect an official position of the National Association for Christian Recovery or its parent organization, Christian Recovery International.

© 2004 Christian Recovery International

## Recovering at Church



**R**ecovery at church? There are certainly a lot of people who find it difficult to imagine at all. Many of us learned early in life that church was not a safe place to tell the truth about what was going on in our lives—not a safe place to be real. If from an early age we practiced the social dynamics of “How are you?” “Fine, thanks,” then telling the truth at church may seem difficult if not impossible to do. If looking good or having a good testimony was what was really valued, then we will have to learn a completely different way of doing church. The reason for that is pretty obvious: Without honesty no recovery is possible. Learning to do church in ways that encourage and support us to tell the truth about ourselves can be an extremely important part of the recovery journey.

Unfortunately, there are still many, many churches that are just not safe places for people in recovery. There are many congregations where the dominant response to any kind of real-life struggle is still “If you really trusted God enough, you’d be better by now.” The most difficult struggles of life are all too often dismissed with simple platitudes such as “Have you prayed about it?” or “If you are not feeling close to God, guess who moved?” These exercises in shame and blame do not help anybody. And they communicate in direct ways that this place is not safe.

It is also clear to me that many congregations are reasonably safe places for people in recovery on Thursday nights or Friday nights at the recovery group meeting but are still unsafe places for people in recovery on Sunday mornings. The marginalization of recovery ministry in many churches means that people in recovery are viewed as people with “special problems.” Until the culture of truth telling, which is essential to recovery and is so fundamentally Christian, has an impact on congregations as a whole, people in recovery will continue to find it difficult to become full participants in the life of a congregation.

It is easy enough to get depressed (or angry) about the culture of dishonesty that is so common in local churches. But when I think about recovery within the church, I find it necessary to remember that there are also many support groups that are not safe places for people in recovery either. There are Twelve Step groups that have become little more than a forum for the repetitious recital of old drunk-a-logs. And there are also lots of therapists’ offices that are not safe places for people in recovery. Sometimes the places that ought to be the safest are just not safe at all. So the local church is not

unique here. It is not just the local church that can be a problem rather than a help to our recovery journey. All human institutions can get in the way.

Recovery is a difficult and dangerous journey, and all of us must do the work of recovery in environments that are sometimes unfriendly or even hostile. It is just not possible to find a perfect environment in which to recover. Ain’t gonna happen. And of course, if we did find a perfect environment in which to do our recovery work, we would have brought along with us all of our baggage and it would soon become obvious that the place was not as safe as we had hoped. Wherever we go, there we are. So while it is perfectly fair to experience frustration when we find a lack of understanding about recovery at church, it would be a mistake to think we need a perfect church in which to recover. We don’t. We don’t need a perfect support group either. We don’t need a perfect therapist. We don’t need a perfect sponsor. We don’t need a perfect church.

Actually, at least on my good days, I have found myself being incredibly optimistic recently about the progress that the recovery movement has made in the Christian community. A professor at a major American seminary—not someone teaching pastoral care courses or personally involved in recovery—recently told me that he felt that having a recovery ministry had rapidly become a basic essential for any evangelical church. That is a huge change in perception about recovery. I have thought a lot about his comment. No one would have said this a decade ago. No one. But God has been busy. Thousands of churches have started recovery ministries. Many others are eager to do so but don’t know how. A recovery ministry is certainly not yet thought to be as essential to a local church as a Sunday School program, but it is certainly on the map in a way that I for one could not have imagined a decade ago. And that is very good news. If we focus on progress rather than perfection, I think it is fair to say there has been an enormous amount of positive change taking place in the Christian community. I know this may be a very small comfort indeed if your own congregation still seems hostile to recovery. And all of us have days when the glass seems half-empty rather than half-full. But the history of the recovery movement is full of remarkable examples of God bringing grace and truth into situations where it seems like shame and denial have dominated. That’s just the kind of thing God seems to love doing—both in our individual lives and in our congregations.

The local church has, of course, been intimately

*Continued on back cover*



Dale Ryan

# Doing Recovery at Church

An interview  
with Rev. Jo Campe

*Jo Campe is the pastor of Central Park United Methodist Church in St. Paul, MN and the director of Central Park Ministries ([www.centralparkministries.org](http://www.centralparkministries.org)). He presented a workshop at last year's STEPS conference on his experience of developing recovery worship services at Central Park, and in this interview he expands on that topic.*

**STEPS:** If I remember your story correctly, you were a bright, young, upwardly mobile pastor-on-the-fast-track kind of guy. Is that right?

**Jo:** That's right. My third church was, arguably at least, the largest church in the United Methodist Church in our area. I was the senior pastor, and we had a staff of about 30 people. I was on the fast track to somewhere, I guess. But I was an active alcoholic at the time, so the only fast track I was really on was the road to try to kill myself as fast as possible. It is certainly true that as my professional career went upward and onward, my disease continued to progress.

**STEPS:** I suppose the average American still tends to think of an alcoholic as a drunk on skid row, not as a successful pastor of a big church or a respectable member of the community. But things are not always as they appear.

**Jo:** That's absolutely right. It is still amazing to me that advancement in my professional life paralleled almost exactly the advancement of my alcoholism. The more successful my life became, the more my addiction progressed. It was kind of a one-to-one ratio somehow. When I was in treatment one of the things I was most worried about was who was going to do my radio and television show, as though that was really what mattered—not what was going to happen to my life. It shows you the extent of the mental distortions and misplaced emphasis that can come with addictions.

**STEPS:** Do you think that kind of misplaced priority is characteristic of alcoholics in general? Or is it more about the way in which pastors become addicts? The need to look good is a particularly strong and seductive thing for many pastors.

**Jo:** I think it just shows the extent of our disease. It is the issue of externals versus internal realities. We often follow the lie that externals can fulfill our internal spiritual needs. We all know that externals are not the answer. But part of the disease of addiction is to keep trying to make the externals do what they can never really do for us. It's one of those things that Paul talks about: "Why is it that I do the things I wish not to do?" When I tell my story at different Twelve Step groups I often share that I would wake up in the morning and pray, "Please don't let me drink today" and then that night when I would fall into a drunken stupor I would say to myself, "How could I have let Christ down so badly today?" It was

a cycle that seemed to confirm what a rotten bum I was.

**STEPS:** Was that your typical pattern—drinking yourself to sleep at night and then getting up the next day to perform?

**Jo:** Typically, yes. I never missed any days at work. In fact, being productive was an important element of my prideful nature. I would typically get up early and get ready for work and work all day, including meetings until 7:30 or 8 at night. Then I'd go home to a large, empty parsonage and drink myself to sleep. And I would repeat the pattern the next day. Day after day.

**STEPS:** So what was it like to get help?

**Jo:** Well, I think that I knew my life was out of control. I could not stop. I began to have many blackouts—periods when I could not remember what I had done while intoxicated. I remember one morning seeing a loaded shotgun in the garage and realizing that in my blackout time I must have been very near suicide. Eventually, I knew either I had to call out for help or I was going to end my life. It's part of the insanity of the disease, I suppose, that both of these options seemed equally unacceptable to me. I was afraid of taking my life, but I was equally afraid of calling out for help. When I did call out for help I knew who to call. I had a good friend who was in the program of A.A. and it just took one phone call. That phone call started the whole process.

**STEPS:** It is pretty remarkable that getting help seems, at the time, just as scary as suicide.

**Jo:** It's all about ego, I think. It was the issue of pride that made it most difficult for me to get help. We have to admit defeat. And that is an enormous blow to the ego. We have to surrender. Part of surrender is surrendering our pretend selves to who we really are. Once we do that, pride becomes a huge issue.

**STEPS:** It's hard to maintain the façade of respectable, successful pastor and get help at the same time. Was your congregation or your denominational staff helpful to you when you decided to get help?

**Jo:** Basically, no. I hate to say it, but I don't really see most of our churches providing help for pastors who are struggling with an addiction. When I came out of treatment, the church I was in and the denomination I was in didn't provide me with much

help. The help I received came almost exclusively from the Twelve Step community. The church I was serving did a miserable job of supporting me. People who were trained to be the caregivers in the community, including the pastoral staff, just didn't know how to be helpful. Fortunately, the A.A. community stepped in, they enfolded me, they were at my home almost every night, they took me to meetings and they made sure I was comfortable and safe.

**STEPS:** It is a sad commentary about the state of the Christian community that we lack the skills to be genuinely helpful to people coming out of treatment.

**Jo:** I think it is that sadness that, at least in part, motivated me to get involved in my current ministry. This ministry has allowed people in brokenness to gather together and to admit their brokenness. And to be helpful to each other.

**STEPS:** Tell us about that. How did you wind up at Central Park? How long after you got out of treatment did you accept a call to that church?

**Jo:** I came out of treatment in September, and by Christmas time I realized that I did not want to continue in my current position. It just wasn't a community that was going to be able to help me take the next steps in my recovery. So I went to our bishop and said I wanted to be reappointed somewhere else; in our denomination we are appointed by the bishop to specific churches. The bishop said he wanted me to stay where I was. I said I'd rather be out of the ministry than to stay there. I served in another church for three years, but during that time I was actively looking for a different kind of ministry. I had spent my whole career in suburban, fast-growing churches where brokenness was a problem rather than the shared foundation for ministry. I wanted something different.

Eventually I was attracted to a small church in downtown St. Paul, right next to the state capitol. It was a very small congregation in an old church—only about 11 people. Most of the space in the building had been rented out to the hospital across the street for use as offices. But that space rental meant that they had a little income that they could use to hire a pastor. What they were looking for was someone who would provide services on Sunday morning and would be available to do funerals as they died off. So I went to the bishop, not really knowing what kind of ministry it would be, but it would be a change and it would give me some time to explore options. Honestly, I wasn't even thinking that much about recovery ministry at the time; I just needed time to reflect and listen carefully to God about ministry.

**STEPS:** This is a very different kind of church from those you gravitated to before you began recovery.

**Jo [laughing]:** Yeah, the building is terrible. It's poorly designed. It has no sense of architecture to it. At my first service there were 11 people. The average age of the congregation was 68. There is no neighborhood around the church. The nearest homes are a government housing project about three quarters of a mile away. No sense of neighborhood at all. It's a terrible location for a church. Actually, it used to be a very large church, but it has been forced to move three times as the urban structure of downtown St. Paul has changed. And every time the church changed location most of



the congregation moved out to the suburbs. So it did not look at all like it had the makings of a rapidly growing, successful, look-good church of the kind in which I had previously served.

Three friends from A.A. came down for the first worship service, and that was the beginning. I didn't know what I was going to do, to tell you the truth. I spent the first six months just settling in and listening. I was going through a divorce at the time, primarily because of the disease of alcoholism. I started searching out different recovery groups in the downtown area. I was amazed when several people from different A.A. groups started coming on Sunday morning to worship with us. One day one of these people said, "Why don't we plan a recovery worship service?" And I said, "Well, that would be great, but I don't have a clue about what a recovery worship service is." He suggested, "Well, let's get a few of us together over breakfast and see what we can come up with." So three or four of us met and put together some ideas.

We planned something for a Sunday at 9 a.m. and we were thinking maybe a dozen people would show up. We had set up in one of our smallest rooms and sort of envisioned it as a small prayer meeting. The first Sunday we had 45 people show up. So we moved to the sanctuary. And we thought, *Well, we'll do this once a month and see if people come back.* The second month we had over 100 people. After a couple of months, we decided to do it every week. We averaged about 100 people each week for the first year. The second year we were averaging over 150 people. We are into the fourth year now and we average 250 people and have two recovery services.

What we actually do has evolved over time as the Spirit has led. Different things have happened. We try to stay pretty loose and flexible in organization and structure. And we have been very fortunate to have a number of people volunteer for leadership roles.

**STEPS:** What interests me about what's happened at Central Park is that you started with a worship service, not with a Twelve Step group or an educational program. There must have been a lot of people with a longing for worship who just did not feel comfortable in other churches. There are many churches to choose from in St. Paul, right?

**Jo:** That's right. The response to the worship service was remarkable. There are many Twelve Step groups around downtown St. Paul, and now we have many in our facility, of course. But that was not our focus at the beginning. We started with the worship service. And we were thinking small. It was kind of fun to see that God had something bigger planned.

**STEPS:** You must have learned a lot about the kind of worship service that works for people in recovery. What have you learned?

**Jo:** I think we have learned a number of things. There are certain things that people say over and over again about what they find to be helpful. We have an active congregation of almost 500 people now. Each Sunday there are about 250 who attend. And we hear pretty much the same things over and over again. First of all, the openness is critical. We start off our worship service with a greeting, and about half the time I start off with a story. It might be a joke or it might be just some kind of story that communicates warmth and welcome. It can have a really down-home feel to it sometimes. People say, "When we come in we notice that people are smiling. There is a sense of being at home and of welcome."

We try to reinforce this sense of warmth by our custom of standing up early in the service to do hugs. We do a lot of hugs at the beginning of worship. Often we have a hard time getting people to settle down again to continue the service. There's a lot of touching. For people who have gone through what our people have gone through, touching is a big deal. Most of us have spent a lot of time alone. We have been the untouchables in our worlds. To be touched correctly is an important thing for us.

Also, every one of our worship services has a story of hope. Somebody tells their story. When we first started doing this we had two pages of rules about what you could and couldn't do when you shared your story. Nobody paid much attention to the rules, of course, but we did try to control things. We gave that up about three years ago. What we do now is just pass a clipboard around and there are two months of slots where people can sign up to share their story. It always fills up.

**STEPS:** I served in a church once where we allowed people to share their story only once a year. I think it was the Thanksgiving Day service. And those of us on staff were absolutely terrified about what would happen. What if so-and-so gets up and goes on and on? We did everything we could to control every last detail of that "open" sharing time. To work your way through those control issues and find a way to really trust God seems like a hugely wonderful thing to me.

**Jo:** It is a powerful part of the service. We have had the most amazing stories. We have been trying to think about a way to record these without violating the traditions of anonymity. I think people, especially people early in recovery who might be in treatment centers, would get a lot out of these stories. Some of them—I don't care where you are or where you have been—they are stories of people who have gone lower than you can imagine. But you can look at them now and see how the love and grace of God have changed things. One guy told the story about "coming to" when the garbage truck compactor was just about to compact him with the rest of the trash. He came leaping out of that com-

There is a  
unique experience  
of God-with-us  
in communion  
services that is very  
powerful for people  
who have been  
God-apart.

pactor down on top of the garbage collector. We've had hundreds of stories of ordinary people who have experienced the power of God in very practical ways.

**STEPS:** Those stories must have a huge effect on the experience of worship. They are so personal, so real.

**Jo:** Also, it's someone sitting right next to you who gets up to tell their story, not some paid professional or some guest speaker with a great story of successful recovery. What we value is telling the truth, not having a polished presentation. It helps that our people are accustomed to telling their stories. They do it in meetings every week. So that's one of the unique things about the way we do worship. We had a guy who spoke the Sunday before last whose longest period of sobriety since 1991 has been nine months. He's been in and out of the program since 1991. That's 15 years of struggle. But he stood up and said, "I've got nine months." And he got a standing ovation. People who have been there understand that it's about progress, not perfection.

Another thing we do is serve the Eucharist every Sunday. That's unusual in the United Methodist context. The reason we do it is, in part, because so many of our people are former Catholics. I don't know how we started it or why we started it. But we did it right from the beginning when we were only doing services once a month. When we went to weekly recovery services it just seemed like the thing to do. So about half of our people cross themselves when they receive communion. We have people crying up at the communion rail on a regular basis. We have other people who are holding each other while they are crying. It's a time of reconciliation that is just phenomenal.

**STEPS:** There seems to be something very important to people in recovery about the Eucharist. Maybe it's about God feeding his people with spiritual food, the nourishment images.

**Jo:** There's also a sense of connection there. Of community. For people who have been disconnected, isolated, that's really important. There is a unique experience of God-with-us in communion services that is very powerful for people who have experienced God-apart.

**STEPS:** Any other lessons learned?

**Jo:** Two other things. First, we are very eclectic in our theology. This has been hard for us. It has been especially hard for me personally. I had to struggle with a wide range of theological instincts within the worship service. I am what you would probably call a mainline theological person. I was trained in the neo-orthodox tradition, and that's where I feel most comfortable. But I have had to expand my horizons and stay open both to positions more conservative than my own and positions more liberal than my own. When people share their stories or when they share songs, those stories and songs can be shaped in very conservative terms or very liberal terms. It's sort of "come and share what you have." We often say, "Take what works and leave the rest." And that's been hard for me. I've had to work on it. It is certainly different from the situation in other congregations in which I have served. The need to let go of control, the need to make room for a wide range of perspectives—that is a really important part of helping

people feel like this is a safe place to be who you are.

Another thing we've learned is to make sure we are not an A.A. church. We are very conscious of not being an A.A. church. We are also very conscious of not being a typical church. We work very hard to try to be in the middle somewhere. If we err, we try to always work back toward the middle. We work on this both theologically and liturgically. We may have something in the call to worship liturgically that would remind you that it comes from the *Big Book*, but it would never say "A.A."

**STEPS:** Tell me more about that. What does it mean to be in the middle?

**Jo:** We have people from all kinds of recovery programs—NA, SA and so on. And we have people who are not in any Twelve Step fellowship. For example, we have two pastors and a former priest who are not in any recovery group and who attend our church on a regular basis. What they tell me is that this is the most authentic church they have found. They happen to all be retired, but they have made a home with us. Because of the issue of the traditions of A.A. we make it real clear that we are not a part of A.A.; we are not an A.A. group or an A.A. activity.

**STEPS:** Do you find that people who are not in A.A. or are not in another Twelve Step fellowship still feel comfortable in the services?

**Jo:** Yes, but I think it's harder. We had some people here at first who were not in any program of recovery, and they wanted us to change and not be as recovery-oriented as we are. One of our people turned to them and said, "You know, I drive by 25 normal churches to get here. Those are okay churches. But those churches haven't saved my life." What he was saying was, "This place is real important for me." If you want a regular church, go to a regular church. We don't need to be a regular church. There a lot of good ones out there. But they are not doing what we are doing.

**STEPS:** Not long ago I was talking to a pastor who was exploring the possibility of getting a recovery ministry started in his church, but he was really anxious about having too many hurting people in the congregation. He was worried about being unbalanced somehow. I remember him asking, "You need to have some healthy people there, don't you?" What's your guts about that?

**Jo [laughing]:** Well, he should work in a healthy church with lots of healthy people if he can find one. But I'd pick real over healthy any day. Other than constantly fight with them, Jesus didn't do much with the "healthy" people in his world. They were called Pharisees back then. I don't think there can be any more real people than those who are open and honest about their brokenness. Every time I stand up and introduce myself to my congregation and I say, "Hi, my name is Jo and I'm an alcoholic," I can't get more real than that. Every time I talk about my brokenness, I can't get more real than that. Every time I talk about my struggles with depression or my struggles in my sermons, how can you get more real than that? For me, that's what we do when we are in recovery. We talk about our struggles. I'm working on a talk for this coming Sunday about Jesus healing the man with a demon. We all know that we still have chains around our feet, chains that we drag around with us. Even though we may have

been through whatever we have been through, we still carry some of those chains and we still need to be healed. We have not been totally healed. We still need to be healed. We need Jesus still. We are still broken and we still need God to speak to us.

**STEPS:** Although you started with a recovery worship service, a lot of recovery groups eventually started meeting at the church. Right?

**Jo:** Yes. We have 20 or so groups meeting now. We also have something called Recovery Life Network, which is a process of looking at a holistic approach to recovery. We have workshops on that on a regular basis. I also do some teaching at different recovery centers or treatment centers. We have three treatment centers that we work with regularly. We are working diligently on creation of a local sober high school. This fall we will be opening a sober high school for kids who have relapsed out of other sober high schools. And we are setting up a mentor program for our people to work with these kids. It should be a challenge, and we are excited about it. Also, we have a meals program for local homeless people. And lots of other things.

**STEPS:** It's a long way from the successful, young, pastor-on-the-fast-track guy you were a few years ago.

**Jo:** You know what I really think has happened? Once I got out of the way, God could do what needed to be done. I really believe that; I say that all the time. Pastors ask me all the time, "What can I do?" And my response is almost always, "Just get out of the way." What did treatment teach me? Get out of the way. Get your ego out of the way. My ego is what kept me drunk. My pride kept me drunk. I thought I was this bigwig and I had all my stuff together and I had all these things. But I knew I didn't, which is why I drank. Inside I knew I was a phony. So I had to do something to cover that up. But eventually the disease of it caught me and I could not get out.

**STEPS:** So how do you go about doing the ministry without feeding the ego?

**Jo:** Well, it's not an easy matter. It's a danger in any kind of ministry. It is what got me sick in the first place. One of the things that is helpful to me is that every Friday morning I go out to a treatment center north of town that treats people who have chronic relapses. I lead a small class for these guys, a dozen chronic relapsers who come right off the streets. I go up there and I "lead" this class. Basically what happens is that these guys minister to me. I realize how close I am to them. They are no different from me. The people who run this center have asked me to lead another group that is much bigger, and I have said no several times. The reason is that I need the reminder that I am no different. I am the same. I need to keep "me" out of the way. As soon as I starting thinking I am special, different, I am in trouble.

*Jo Campe is interested in connecting with others who are developing Twelve Step-oriented recovery churches. You can contact him at [campe@centralparkministries.org](mailto:campe@centralparkministries.org).*

**NEW!** From the creators of Confident Kids

## Kids Like Me!

A Christian Support Group Program  
for Children of Alcoholics/Addicts and Related Issues

Are you looking for a way to minister to the kids  
who come to your recovery ministry?  
Tired of putting them in child care that  
does NOT address their needs?  
Wishing you had a new resource for  
your Confident Kids program?

**Kids Like Me!** is a detailed curriculum for children ages 5–12 years. Volume 1 contains 13 sessions (a full quarter) with a separate lesson plan for elementary (5–8 yrs.) and a preteens (9–12 yrs.). *Session Summary* sheets tell parents what their children learned in each session and gives them a To-Do-At-Home Activity to use during the week. **Kids Like Me!** is available now from:

Confident Kids Support Groups  
2422 Divide Way, Santa Maria, CA 93458  
Toll Free Order Line: 877-494-KIDS  
email: [KLM@confidentkids.com](mailto:KLM@confidentkids.com)  
Visit us online for more information at:  
[www.confidentkids.com](http://www.confidentkids.com)

## Call for STEPS 2005 Workshop Proposals

We invite you to consider organizing a workshop for STEPS 2005. We usually have about 50 workshops at STEPS conferences on a *very* wide range of topics. Because our theme for 2005 is "Spirituality and the Healing Journey" we are particularly interested in proposals that explore the spiritual dynamics of recovery—but we welcome proposals on any recovery topic. If you are interested in submitting a proposal for a workshop, please send your name, contact information, a brief bio and a description of the kind of workshop you would like to present to:

STEPS 2005 Workshops  
PO Box 215, Brea, California 92822

or email your proposal to [steps2005@nacronline.com](mailto:steps2005@nacronline.com)

Workshops can be teaching sessions or they can involve more active participation by those in attendance. The more you can tell us about your approach to a particular workshop topic, the easier it will be for us to make decisions. Please understand that we always receive many more excellent proposals than we are able to accept. Workshop presenters are provided with one free full-time registration for the conference. The NACR is not able to provide an honoraria for presenters or to assist with travel or lodging expenses.

## Why Is Spirituality So Hard for Pastors?

by Dale O. Wolery

Recently I approached the Cinnabon counter in an airport. I was unable to resist the smell. My mouth watered with the anticipation of the taste of one of those delightful cinnamon rolls. As I placed my order, I asked the woman behind the counter if she ever grew tired of them.

What she said surprised me. She told me that she no longer had a taste for them at all. She never ate them and had no desire to do so. Over time, the familiarity and the availability had deadened her senses to those mouth-watering delights. What I anticipated with eager expectation, she found unremarkable and unappealing.

Spirituality can be like that, especially for pastors and other ministry professionals. It can be difficult to maintain a consistent, vibrant, growing relationship with God that impacts our relationships with others, because God stuff can become so familiar and so available that we no longer anticipate it with eagerness. We can lose our taste for it just like the Cinnabon seller lost her taste for cinnamon rolls. It is not the kind of thing that usually happens quickly. It might take decades. But after more than 35 years of reading the Bible, praying, trying to be a “good Christian,” attending church (pastors do this more than most), and even leading churches, I must admit to the frustrating reality that enjoying a genuine, mature spirituality is no longer as easy as I had hoped. Over time the familiarity and the availability have had a deadening effect on my spiritual senses.

I think that this tendency to avoid the familiar is a common problem. It’s probably worse for some than for others. I suspect that those of us who struggle with ADD are at particular risk for this kind of thing. We long for the stimulation of new things, not the same old stuff. But while the problem may be common, I have come to believe that it is a particularly difficult struggle for pastors.

Now, some of you may already be thinking that I just have run out of all the other reasons, or excuses, for pastors who struggle, and that I’m reaching for the “It’s harder for pastors” excuse. But if you’ll think with me for a moment about the difficulties of our journeys, you may find encouragement, whether you’re a pastor or not, to keep pursuing your journey with diligence.

### Doing and Being

For me the problems posed by the familiarity and availability of spiritual realities seem closely related to the difficulty we have in balancing activities and relationships. Being a human doer can get in the way of relationships. What I do and what I don’t do get in the way of my relationship with the Lord.

Pastors, as a group, are religious doers. We must pray, read the Bible, sing the songs, tend to the liturgy, care for others as God’s representatives, and talk a lot about God. To complicate matters further, we must not only do these activities, but we must get better and better at them and

lead others in doing them. Surely there is nothing inherently wrong with doing these things and leading others in them, but the danger for me has been the ease with which I have deceived myself into believing that because I do all of these God-related activities, I must have a quality relationship with God. Other people seem to think this is true. The idea that pastors are closer to God because they do God-related activities is pretty common. These activities, when done well, seem to say to everyone, including me, “He must be spiritual. Look how good he is at [fill in the blank].” But this is self-deception. It is a crippling blight to healthy spirituality. When I deceive myself, even in doing all the right religious activities, a distance from God replaces a relationship with God. Doing religious things further hinders me because it often escalates to more and more doing. This becomes an expanding cycle of harried activity that minimizes my capacity for a relationship with everyone around me and with the Lord too. I have become so busy doing the God kind of work that I exclude the power of God’s Spirit to mold and nurture my soul.

What I don’t do also hinders my spiritual growth. The clear expectation in Christian circles is that pastors must not do some of the things that others do. Whether it be cursing, excessive drinking, flirting, gambling, sexual activity outside of marriage, gluttony or whatever—pastors are just not supposed to do the “bad” things that others do. At least, if they do some of these bad things, they should not do them as much. Or they should do them in private. Or they should at least feel more shame about these things than the average person does.

This expectation traps pastors in two ways. First, we learn to hide the “bad” things we do. We get good at a secret life. We do all the religious stuff with skill but maintain another world—a world of secrecy that damages our spiritual growth. Second, we become proud of what we don’t do, and like the Pharisees, we assume that not doing certain things makes us righteous before God.

Both of these traps are deadly to spiritual maturity. Whether we are regular people or pastors (who are also regular people), real spirituality is an ongoing battle. Doing or not doing familiar religious activities just might deaden our taste to genuine spiritual life.

Are you becoming too familiar with God activities to enjoy the freshness of God’s work in you? If so, stop, look, listen. He keenly desires you, not tasteless religious activities.

*Dale Wolery is the executive director of the Clergy Recovery Network ([www.clergyrecovery.com](http://www.clergyrecovery.com)) and is a former executive director of the NACR.*



Dale Wolery

# When You Are Ready To Try Again

## Going Back to Church

by  
Jeff Van Vonderen

When we were born we had no idea what was in store for us in our physical family. And we had nothing to say about the behaviors, character traits, or priorities of our biological family. None of us could choose what our family would be like.

But what if it weren't impossible? What if we did have a choice? What if, prior to actually becoming part of a family, we were given some choice in the matter and some guidelines that would help us look for a healthy family? We do have this kind of opportunity when it comes to our church family. We do have a choice. And guidelines do exist. The New Testament tells us some of the things we can expect in our spiritual family, among them support from one another, love, and a place to be in process.

Based on those guidelines, here are some questions that I would ask about any family I was considering becoming a member of:

- Do people in this family care about things that really matter?
- Do people in this family respond to people's mistakes with grace and patience?
- Are the people in this family gentle and giving?
- Or are they mean, caring only about themselves?
- Is telling the truth in this family more important than image management?
- Does honesty get sacrificed in the service of maintaining a superficial, false peace?
- After being with this family for a while, do I have a growing dependence on the work of Jesus? Do I revel more and more in his love?
- Or do I feel emotionally and spiritually heavier as time goes on, and less qualified to be a family member?

I hope that you have gained permission to be in a healing process. And I hope you have had a glimpse of what is yours as a son or daughter of a God who loves you and is patient with that process. I now want to give you some practical criteria that will aid you in your search for a church in which and through which you can become a functioning member of the body of Christ.

### Avoiding Hurtful Churches

In *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, David Johnson and I identified common characteristics of spiritually abusive systems. When these traits are present they make the relationships in that spiritual family hurtful. I would like to use those characteristics of graceless churches as a starting point from which to venture into a discussion of the characteristics of grace-full churches.

In hurtful churches you find the following seven characteristics:

1. *Power-posturing*. Those in leadership positions spend a lot of time and energy reminding others of their authority. Authority is used to boss and control members of God's family.

2. *Performance preoccupation*. How people act is more important than what's really going on in their lives. People aren't what is loved and accepted. Behavior is the most important thing.

3. *Unspoken rules*. How relationships function is governed by rules that aren't said out loud, but in many cases these unspoken rules have more weight than the out-loud rules or even Scripture. The most powerful and damaging of all the unspoken rules is the "can't talk" rule. This rule keeps the truth quiet because the problem itself isn't treated as the problem; talking about it is treated as the problem. People who notice problems and confront them are labeled divisive and disloyal. People shut up and call it unity.

4. *Lack of balance*. There are disproportionate focuses and values placed on certain areas of the Christian life. For instance, you must agree that certain gifts of the Spirit aren't for today or you're labeled "unstable" or "deceived." In other churches, if you lack certain spiritual gifts or don't exercise the gifts in ways accepted by the group, you are considered a second-class Christian.

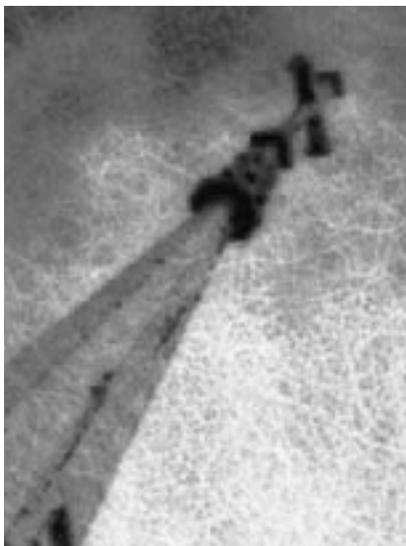
5. *Spiritual paranoia*. There is a sense that people, resources, and relationships outside the system are unsafe.

6. *Misplaced loyalty*. A sense of loyalty is built toward programs, things, and people, rather than toward Jesus.

7. *Secretiveness*. Certain information is deemed suitable only for those within the church or only for certain people within the church.

### Finding a Grace-full Church

It's unlikely that one church would exhibit all seven of the characteristics I have just mentioned. Conversely, it's likely that even in a healthy church you could find one of these traits, or some inkling of these dynamics from time to time. But wherever even one of these dynamics is present in God's family people are apt to get hurt. And without exception, churches with a



“can’t talk” rule will be extremely hurtful to their members. In these places problems can’t be confronted or resolved because you become “the problem” for talking about the problem. Consequently, the offenders are isolated from accountability, and the ones hurt are isolated from healing. There is no chance for the healing that true unity in Christ brings.

The characteristics of grace-full, healthy churches are the opposite of those I’ve described in the preceding list. The degree to which the following characteristics are found in a church is the degree to which members of God’s family can grow in honest, healthy relationships with one another and God. These dynamics best characterize grace-full churches:

### 1. *Authority and power are used to serve, equip, and empower others.*

In Matthew 23, Jesus says that the greater leader is the one who is the servant. This is the distinguishing mark of leaders in the kingdom of God. Likewise, in Ephesians 5 Paul describes the “head” as the person who treats the life of another as more important than his own. The kingdom of God is the only place where you find these definitions. It’s as if Jesus and Paul are handing us a dictionary to help us understand what things mean in the kingdom. You can find bloodthirsty CEOs in corporate America. In legalistic religious families you can find tyrannical heads and leaders. In emerging nations you can find despotic leaders who call the shots and punish anyone who disagrees. But not so in the kingdom. People who use their authority to these ends in the kingdom have no authority, at least not from God.

True spiritual authority isn’t taken or asserted. It doesn’t come because you hold a titled position, receive a degree, or get a salary. It is given by God for the purpose of shepherding God’s flock. In grace-full churches, those with authority use it to serve, build, and liberate the members of God’s family. They do not use it to manipulate or control.

Respect for authority isn’t demanded by getting puffed up or loud, or by using God’s Word as a sledgehammer. A person who has to spend a lot of time reminding people of his or her authority—and as much energy demanding that people yield to that authority—does so because they have no real authority. True authority is noticed. In Matthew 7 the gospel writer says of the Lord that when he had finished teaching, the crowd was amazed at what he had said. Why? “He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes”<sup>1</sup>—that is, those who had the title and who demanded respect for their position but had no authority.

What a rebuke this is to many Christian leaders. I received a letter from some parents in Florida whose children were sexually abused by a man in their church. The pastors (who were also leaders in their church-operated Christian school) used their position to quiet and even drive away anyone who tried to hold this man accountable or to get the children help. After all, if someone needs help for being abused, someone else must be doing the abusing. These leaders were only concerned with protecting their image in the community. They were worried that people would leave and that giving would drop. Besides, the perpetrator was related to a teacher in their school. They weren’t willing to risk losing the teacher. Even worse, they demanded respect from these hurting parents for their actions, and used religious rhetoric and Bible verses to pressure and shame them for wanting outside help.

Rather than demanding our respect for their authority, those with true authority, who use it for the reasons God gave it, command our respect with their faith, integrity and consistency. In 1 Peter 5:2–3 Peter tells leaders to “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercis-

ing oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted [literally, the inheritance—that’s you!] to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

### 2. *Believers are fighting the “good fight of faith.”*

Ask yourself whether you’re being encouraged to depend more on Jesus to walk more fully in your spiritual inheritance. Or is the message just, “Try harder this coming week to be a good Christian” or, “Do such-and-such in order to live up to the spiritual standard”? These questions represent my own little test. I have frequent opportunities to visit various churches as I travel, and seldom do I go away from the morning service or Sunday school class or Wednesday evening fellowship without knowing where a church stands on these matters.

Embrace teaching when it encourages you to embrace Jesus. Then you will be around believers participating in the same struggle you are—the fight of faith. Try-hard messages indicate that people fight to live by their own religious self-effort, by worship of the will. This kind of church is a religious version of the world’s systems, which also withhold love and acceptance until our behavior measures up. Yes, you may be welcomed with open arms as a visitor, but as a member your walk with God will most likely be wide open for the scrutiny and criticism of all who “know” what your spirituality should look like.

Not one of us is above accountability. But frankly, our relationship with Jesus is too precious to allow it to be dragged through the mud. In 1 Corinthians 4:3–4 Paul says, “But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.”

We should listen to the exhortations or confrontations of others when they encourage us toward spiritual freedom in Christ. But the only approval we need to be concerned about is God’s—and we have that because of Jesus. In fact, even when those who scrutinize our performance are wrong, it is still Jesus’ actions toward us that validate us, not our personal innocence.

At this point, I must issue a disclaimer: I’m not saying that obedience isn’t important. It is. I’m not saying that right behaviors don’t matter. They do. But our “works” must be a result of faith. Holy living flows out of hearts dependent upon God.

In Colossians 2:6 Paul says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” You didn’t come to God with a list of your accomplishments in order to earn his approval. You came by faith, depending on his power to move you from death into life. Live your life dependent on that same power to conform you to the image of his Son.

In Philippians 3 Paul issues strong warnings to believers to watch out for those who would hold up religious behavior as the means to righteousness. In fact, he calls “enemies of the cross” those who add anything to the cross of Christ as a means to God’s acceptance. Why? Because they perpetuate the idea that the cross isn’t enough. Beware of them and the churches they attend.

### 3. *Rules are spoken about out loud, and they are biblical.*

In a grace-full church, God’s rules are important. But God’s rules are to serve the ones he loves and to help their lives and relationships work better. He didn’t give the rules as a means of earning his approval. He gave his Son so that we may receive his acceptance, and his Son is a gift to us.

Consider these two scenarios. Just after you cross the Highway 70 bridge from Minnesota into Wisconsin, there is a sign that reads: “BUCKLE YOUR SEAT BELTS—IT’S OUR LAW!” In other words, do it or else! But this can be said in a different way. Because I wasn’t raised in a seat belt-conscious era, I often forget to buckle my seat belt. But my daughter Erin is acutely aware of the wisdom in doing that, thanks to driver’s education and the media. Every time she gets into the car with me she buckles her own seat belt and then looks over at me and says, “Papa, buckle your seat belt.” Both Erin and the State of Wisconsin are right, because I could die if my seat belt isn’t buckled at the time of an accident. But Erin’s exhortation comes in the context of a relationship. She loves me and has my best interest in mind, so she prescribes a behavior. That’s why God gave his rules, and that’s the spirit in which we should approach them.

When a rule is broken, it is the behavior that healthy people reject, not the person. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” While God might hate some of our behaviors, he still accepts us. The rest of Romans 8 is testimony to the fact that nothing and no one can separate us from his love. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our behavior. Legalism condemns the believer and calls God’s acceptance into question.

Even in the case of church discipline (1 Corinthians 5) there are two goals in removing a person from the fellowship. The first is to protect the sheep from someone who is unrepentant and is having a negative influence on the flock. The second is to benefit the person and even attempt to bring him back into Christ and into fellowship (see 2 Corinthians 2).

Not only are God’s rules there to benefit us and our relationships, but they are based on Scripture and apply equally to everyone. Don’t confuse traditions or people’s obsessive/compulsive religious habits with scriptural precepts. And if a rule favors a certain person (the spouse of a leader, for example, or people who have been there the longest, or the loudest people in the church business meeting), or if a rule is too silly or rigid to say out loud, it shouldn’t be a rule. It is wrong to hold people accountable for rules they didn’t know were operating, especially rules that are too goofy to write down and pass around.

#### *4. There is deference to the true Head of the Church, his agenda, and his methods.*

People are wounded in churches where more authority or wisdom is ascribed to people just because they have an education or to people who “don’t need one” because they get all their teaching right from the Holy Spirit. Or because they exercise certain gifts of the Spirit—or don’t, because they are dispensationally “enlightened.” Or because they are related to a religious celebrity through whom God is doing mighty works, while others are treated as spiritual third cousins, once removed.

In grace-full churches, gifts of the Spirit are appreciated as gifts. Even religious training is looked at as a gift. And people are gifts to the church from God, placed there just as he sees fit. Everyone needs everyone else, and greater honor is intentionally directed toward those whose actions or positions don’t naturally draw honor in their direction (1 Corinthians 12).

Grace-full churches belong to God, not to people. People are simply stewards, table waiters, of the resources God provides, and not owners. I once attended a conference where the speaker posed this question: “Can the true Head of the Church do anything he wants to at your church?” It hit me like a ton of bricks. Because at that time my answer was no. Jesus couldn’t change the agenda for the missions budget. He couldn’t have a different opinion from that of the people who started the church. He couldn’t show up in any ways that we couldn’t control or explain. He couldn’t even change the order of service if he wanted to.

Just because we do things in God’s name doesn’t mean God is doing it or is even in it. To write “Church” on the door or stationery sometimes results in a case of mistaken identity. If we insist on our church being our church, we risk hearing Jesus say, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matthew 23:38). Literally, “I leave to you the house of you.” If Jesus has left your church, is that a place you really want to be?

#### *5. Our safety is in Christ, and so diversity is welcomed.*

“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” Even as an immature, mostly inappropriate, and unregenerate adolescent I used to think, “If we’re as right as we think we are, how come we’re hiding in this church building? Why is it necessary to avoid everyone?”

In 1 Corinthians 5:9–11, Paul speaks with clarity to the matter of thinking that our safety is in staying away from people outside our group. Because our safety is in Christ, who lives on the inside, we don’t have to avoid those on the outside—which, as Paul reminds us, isn’t possible anyway. In Hebrews 13:5–6, we are reminded that Jesus himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” so that we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?” (Ps. 118:6).

An outgrowth of finding our safety in Christ within us is that we can welcome and associate with a diverse group of believers. I recently spoke with a woman who moved with her husband back into the area where his family lived. They began attending the family’s church and initially felt welcome. As time went on, however, they were taught that this church was the only true church. Since this church’s baptism was the only one that counted, this couple would need to be rebaptized in order to be accepted into full fellowship. Also, visitors and nonmembers weren’t allowed to take communion. They could watch from the balcony.

If a church’s so-called safety is in doctrines, traditions, and step-

**Pastors, programs,  
denominations, doctrine—  
these are all resources  
from the Source, given to  
serve us so that we in turn  
can serve others. While  
it may be appropriate  
to affiliate, gravitate,  
commiserate, congregate,  
or cooperate, it is never  
okay to elevate, capitulate,  
or be found prostrate  
before anyone but the  
Lord.**

ping inside church walls, then you will always be asked to divide from other members of God's family. The reasons can be almost anything. Some churches divide you from others based on whether a day in Genesis was a 24-hour day; whether Jesus is coming back before, during, or after the tribulation; the length of people's hair; whether hymns or choruses are sung; or issues of religious politics too numerous to mention.

If the personal relationship with Christ that made you a member of his body doesn't qualify you for acceptance in a local manifestation of that body, or if you have to go through another spiritual "rinse" cycle in order to be accepted, what would make you want to stay in such a system?

#### 6. *Loyalty to Christ and his kingdom takes precedence.*

Two statements that Jesus said are pertinent here: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37) and, "No one can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). Pastors, programs, denominations, doctrine—these are all resources from the Source, given to serve us so that we in turn can serve others. While it may be appropriate to affiliate, gravitate, commiserate, congregate, or cooperate, it is never okay to elevate, capitulate to, or be found prostrate before anyone but the Lord. One of the outgrowths of tenacious loyalty to Jesus is unity with other believers. People are brought together when they depend upon their common Source, and they become involved in the common cause of building his kingdom.

#### 7. *Honesty and openness are present.*

In safe, grace-full churches, honesty matters. Being able to notice and talk about reality matters more than how things look. Finding the truth is more important than being right. Secrets cannot survive in an environment of truth and honesty. In fact, they aren't necessary.

There is a difference between issues that are private and confidential and those that are a secret. There are things that aren't the business of the entire church, such as how you or another person struggles with a certain problem.

While your income isn't any business of the pastor, his or her salary is your business. And the way you conduct that business is through competent, wise, faithful people to whom the financial affairs have been delegated. Neither are the salaries of the church staff a secret—but in my opinion, they should be kept private. There are certainly many church matters that should be kept confidential and not made matters of public discussion. But watch out if what is private is also kept secret from those who legitimately hold responsibility.

### **Learning to trust again**

I would like to share one more tool you can add to your relationship toolbox. I believe it will be helpful to you as you embark upon or continue in your search for a healthy church. The following lists are from Pat Springle's excellent book *Trusting*, in which he helps us learn who and how to trust again.<sup>2</sup>

It is foolish to:

- Trust people who consistently wound you
- Believe people who consistently give double messages
- Think that intimidating people have your best interests in mind
- See people as all good or all bad
- Withdraw from all people because some have hurt you

- Try to figure things out by yourself
- Seek advice from foolish people
- Avoid conflict at all costs
- Stir up conflict
- Be too self-disclosing in order to earn others' love or pity

It is wise to:

- Call on God and wise people for help
- Be cautious about trusting people
- Slowly elevate your level of trust in others as they prove their trustworthiness
- Be honest with most people about your feelings and desires
- Withhold your feelings and desires from abusive people
- Be realistic about the growth process of learning to trust perceptively
- Forgive and love, but not necessarily trust, others
- Expect conflict when you are honest
- Learn to communicate clearly and calmly with all kinds of people who mistrust
- Realize that even trustworthy people will sometimes fail you

The writer of Hebrews tells us that it's important to "...forsake not the assembling of ourselves together." This is not about the ritual of going to a certain geographical location with a certain group of people at certain times during the week. This is about relationships that build God's people and spread his kingdom. My goal in this article has been to present some things to remember when looking for a safe church, one that is building the right kingdom.

When the actions and attitudes of God's family members toward one another breach the "family contract" found in the New Testament, people experience the fine print of the Christian life. Believers feel hurt, disappointment, disillusionment, and fear in trying again. Outside the church, the world that so desperately needs to find life in Jesus thinks the church is irrelevant.

When we live consistently with who we are and what we have as his people, those of us in God's family experience what he has promised us. The world then might even respond to the working of Jesus' body the way people responded to the work of Jesus: "They were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this'" (Mark 2:12).

Please try again. Though you have suffered and lost, there is a lot to gain—for you, for the lost around you, and for the whole family of God.

<sup>1</sup> All scripture quotations in this article are from the New American Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Springle, *Trusting* (Highland Books, 1995).

*Jeff VanVonderen is one of the principal interventionists to appear on the soon-to-be-released reality series "Intervention" on the A&E network. For more information visit [www.spiritualabuse.com](http://www.spiritualabuse.com) or [www.innervention.com](http://www.innervention.com). This article is adapted from his book When God's People Let You Down (Bethany House, 1995).*

## So I Stay Near the Door

By Sam Shoemaker



I stay near the door.  
I neither go too far in, nor stay too far  
out,  
The door is the most important door in  
the world—  
It is the door through which men walk  
when they find God.  
There's no use my going way inside, and  
staying there,  
When so many are still outside, and  
they, as much as I,  
Crave to know where the door is.  
And all that so many ever find  
Is only the wall where a door ought to  
be.  
They creep along the wall like blind  
men,  
With outstretched, groping hands,  
Feeling for a door, knowing there must  
be a door,  
Yet they never find it - - -  
So I stay near the door.  
The most tremendous thing in the world  
Is for men to find that door—the door  
to God.

The most important thing any man can do  
Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands,  
And put it on the latch—the latch that only clicks  
And opens to the man's own touch.  
Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die  
On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter—  
Die for want of what is within their grasp.  
They live, on the other side of it—because they have found it.  
Nothing else matters compared to helping them find it,  
And open it, and walk in, and find Him - - -  
So I stay near the door.  
Go in, great saints, go all the way in—  
Go way down into the cavernous cellars,  
And way up into the spacious attics—  
It is a vast, roomy house, this house where God is.  
Go into the deepest of hidden casements,  
Of withdrawal, of silence, or sainthood.  
Some must inhabit those inner rooms,  
And know the depths and heights of God,  
And call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is.  
Sometimes I take a deeper look in,  
Sometimes venture a little farther;  
But my place seems closer to the opening - - -  
So I stay near the door.  
There is another reason why I stay there.  
Some people get part way in and become afraid  
Lest God and the zeal of His house devour them;

For God is so very great,  
and asks all of us.  
And these people feel a cosmic  
claustrophobia.  
And want to get out.  
“Let me out!” they cry.  
And the people way inside only  
terrify them more.  
Somebody must be by the door to tell  
them that they are spoiled  
For the old life, they have  
seen too much;  
Once taste God, and nothing  
but God will do any more.  
Somebody must be watching  
for the frightened  
Who seek to sneak out just  
where they came in,  
To tell them how much better it is  
inside.  
The people too far in do not see  
how near these are  
To leaving—preoccupied with the  
wonder of it all.  
Somebody must watch for those who

have entered the door,  
But would like to run away. So for them too,  
I stay near the door.  
I admire the people who go way in.  
But I wish they would not forget how it was  
Before they got in. Then they would be able to help  
The people who have not yet even found the door,  
Or the people who want to run away again from God.  
You can go in too deeply, and stay too long,  
And forget the people outside the door.  
As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,  
Near enough to God to hear Him, and know He is there,  
But not so far from men as not to hear them,  
And remember they are there, too.  
Where? Outside the door—  
Thousands of them, millions of them.  
But—more important for me—  
One of them, two of them, ten of them,  
Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.  
For those I shall stay by the door and wait  
For those who seek it.  
“I had rather be a door-keeper . . . “  
So I stay near the door.

*From a 1958 pamphlet from the Episcopal Church Archives in Austin, Texas, as published on [www.aabibliography.com/dickbhtml/article10.html](http://www.aabibliography.com/dickbhtml/article10.html).*



## Theological Education & Recovery

by Dale Ryan

When I left seminary I had only a very limited understanding of addiction and abuse. It was certainly not a high priority in the seminary curriculum. If they came up at all, addiction and abuse were usually assumed to be unusual. Recovery ministry was thought to be a kind of specialization within the general category of pastoral care.

It did not take me long in the real world of ministry, however, to realize that this neglect of addiction and abuse was a huge mistake. Addiction was everywhere. Abuse was commonplace. Why, I wondered, had I not been better prepared for realities this important and this common? I soon felt like I was engaged in a kind of asymmetric spiritual warfare. There was clearly a war being waged, but I was almost completely ignorant about the weapons that the enemies of God's kingdom were finding to be most useful. Weapons of mass insanity did exist—and I was clueless about them.

I was reasonably well trained to be helpful in situations involving crisis and grief; that had been part of the training. But there is a huge difference between the instincts and skills necessary for helping people who are struggling with crisis and grief and the instincts and skills necessary for helping people who are struggling with addiction and abuse.

For one thing, crises and grief are unavoidable kinds of suffering. We all experience crises and grief in our lives. They're part of the package. Addiction and abuse, however, are *avoidable* kinds of suffering. They are not necessary. Someone must make some very bad choices, usually over a long period of time, for addiction and abuse to emerge. This introduces a completely different dynamic, one that was very confusing to me at first. When I left seminary I had very few "handles," intellectually, theologically or spiritually, to help me understand the complexities of addiction and abuse. And I believe this is true of most pastors today.

Some people say that pastors and lay leaders should be trained primarily to deal with the unavoidable of life, since those are probably the issues that most people struggle with, and that we should leave things like addiction and abuse for specialists. That's what I thought when I was in seminary. And it would make sense if crisis and grief were common but addiction and abuse were rare. Tragically, the evidence suggests otherwise. Anyone reading STEPS will already probably understand this: Addiction is not just a problem for the street drunks downtown. I am convinced that addiction is the most common struggle faced by people in most churches—and for that matter, in most communities.

The World Health Organization keeps track of a long list of diseases and risk factors that contribute to what they call the Global Burden of Disease. It is an attempt to quantify what factors lead to premature death and disability on a global basis. In those parts of the world where infant malnutrition is rare, the single largest factor that contributes to premature death and disability is the use of addictive substances. Nothing else comes close. The contribution from addiction to premature death and disability is almost

twice as large as the next most important factor (high blood pressure). So the suffering caused by addiction is not rare. Good data about the incidence of abuse is rather more difficult to find, but most studies in the U.S. suggest that 25 to 35 percent of women experience some form of sexual abuse at some time in their lives. If we try to do ministry in a culture with that level of abuse and addiction and we do not understand the dynamics of abuse and addiction, we will make lots of very unfortunate and unnecessary mistakes.

We live in a world full of addiction and abuse, and if you want to do ministry in this context, it just makes sense to acquire some basic understanding and skills to help you in the battle. The reason most people resist and even reject the love and grace of God can be traced to the dynamics of addiction and abuse. Sending people into this battle who don't understand these weapons is a recipe for failure. Unfortunately, that kind of failure is all too obvious right now. How many really good, kind, well-educated and well-intentioned pastors have crashed and burned in the last decade because they were essentially defenseless to one addiction or another? Well, I don't know the exact number either. But it's many. Their preparation for ministry no doubt provided them with many useful tools. But only in rare cases does a seminary education currently give people who are preparing for ministry a thorough understanding of addiction and abuse. And only in rare cases does it give them an opportunity to explore the ways in which addiction and abuse might be affecting their own life and ministry.

Fortunately, one seminary is starting to train pastors in understanding these complexities and responding to them in helpful ways. Fuller Theological Seminary, based in Pasadena, California, has established a new Institute in Recovery Ministry. It is a part of the School of Theology at Fuller, and its goals are pretty simple. We want to help train pastors who are interested in this area of ministry; we want to support, train and encourage leaders of recovery groups; and we would like to find ways to encourage the whole Christian recovery movement, both in the U.S. and around the world.

How the Institute got started is a longer story. I've been teaching a course at Fuller for quite a while—a course called "Recovery Ministry in the Local Church." Over a couple of years I had several conversations with David Augsburg, who was then Dean of the School of Theology, about the possibility of setting up an Institute for Recovery Ministry. There was no doubt in either of our minds that pastors, missionaries, chaplains and other religious professionals need help in this area, both personally and professionally. But it wasn't clear that it was the right time. I've done several projects over the years that later seemed to be a decade too soon, and I didn't want to invest in yet another project that was before its time. But after a couple of years of talking about it, it just seemed like the time to bite the bullet and see if there was suf-

ficient support for the idea. Fortunately, about this time a major donor promised some basic startup funding for the project. So we decided to give it our best shot.

The response has been pretty enthusiastic for the most part. The faculty at Fuller seem to understand the need for pastors to be better trained in the area of recovery ministry, and have been quite supportive. Fuller's Board of Trustees has been equally enthusiastic. So we are off and running.

We have three new degree options for Fuller students. First, students working on an M.Div. degree, the typical degree for people training to become pastors, can get an M.Div. with a concentration in Recovery Ministry. Secondly, we now offer a Master of Arts in Recovery Ministry. And finally, there is a Certificate in Recovery Ministry for people who want to take only the core recovery courses. Details about each of these programs can be found on the Institute web site at [www.fullerinstitute.org](http://www.fullerinstitute.org).

Training in recovery ministry is new territory for seminaries. Many seminaries offer counseling degrees or social work degrees, but I think Fuller is the first to give this kind of importance to recovery ministry. It is the first, but I certainly hope it will not be the last. Many other seminaries could use programs of this kind.

It will probably not come as a surprise that I have a long list of things I would love for the Institute to do. It is my hope that it will offer regular think-tank events for leaders of various kinds of recovery ministries. I'm hopeful that eventually we can offer an extensive, non-degree training program for support-group leaders. There are also a number of research projects that I think need to be done to demonstrate the effectiveness and value of Christian recovery ministry, and I hope that over the long haul the Institute can be involved in that kind of research. But we are still at the very early stages of this adventure. For now, I'm excited just to have an institution like Fuller with the vision to support Christian recovery ministry in a major way.

Does this mean the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry will graduate healthier pastors? I'm not sure about that. I am under no illusion about the limitations of education. If you give an addict a first-class education, what do you get? You get an educated addict. Education is not the answer to addiction. Education can't make you sober. Or healthy. On the other hand, there are a lot of things that education can help with. It can help us break out of the layers of denial about addiction and abuse. It can give us some intellectual, theological and spiritual handles on these problems. And those can, hopefully, keep us from responding in unhelpful ways to people struggling with addiction and abuse. There are limits to how helpful education can be. But there are very few limits to how hurtful ignorance can be. So education has an important role to play in helping the Christian community become a healthier place.

Just as recovery ministry can change the ways that pastors respond to those struggling with addiction and abuse, I think recovery ministry could also change the way we do church in some very fundamental ways. You can certainly have a recovery ministry that is just another kind of church program, just another event on the calendar. But if addiction and abuse are really the most significant struggles faced by people within our congregations and also in the community that we have been called to reach with the Good News, then recovery probably will not wind up as just another program. Instead, it will start to shape the purpose and identity of each congregation as a whole. How would our worship services change if we remembered that a third of

the congregation has experienced sexual abuse? How would our Christian education programs change if we remembered that a significant percentage of the children we are called to reach with the Gospel come from alcoholic homes? How would our world missions strategies change if we understood the global impact of addiction? I've got more questions than answers. So stay tuned. I think over the next decade we will see some very creative efforts in all these areas.

*Dale Ryan is the executive director of the NACR ([www.nacronline.com](http://www.nacronline.com)) and the director of the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry ([www.fullerinstitute.org](http://www.fullerinstitute.org)).*

## Fellowship in Recovery

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.  
1 Corinthians 13:3

Because we have been wounded in relationships, our instinct is often to run from relationships. We don't want to be hurt again. This leaves an enormous void in our souls. And it is this void which we desperately try to fill with addictions and compulsions of various kinds. This text focuses on two manifestations of religious addiction (compulsive altruism and religiously motivated self-abuse) and sums up the result: I gain nothing. The same could be said of all of our addictions. "I deliver my body to be burned" and "I gain nothing" are an accurate description not only of a particular kind of religious addiction but also of substance addiction, work addiction, sexual addiction and relationship addiction, as well as many self-abusive compulsions. We gain nothing for all the time and effort we spend on trying to numb the pain. It does not achieve the desired result. The void remains.

Although loving fellowship may be frightening for us, it is the path to recovery. The vulnerabilities of intimacy may remind us of earlier times of terror in life, but there is no way to recover in isolation. The net result of compulsions and addictions is "I gain nothing." But the net result of recovery is very different. There is something to be gained by all the hard work that recovery requires. Recovery builds in us a capacity to receive love and a capacity to give love to others. And that is a real gain.

May God grant you the courage you need today to pursue loving fellowship.

Lord, you see my guarded heart.  
You see my fears that make me run from love.  
What I fear is what I want most.  
I want to love and to be loved.  
Give me courage to open my heart to love today.  
Amen.

*From: Rooted in God's Love, Dale and Juanita Ryan*

*Bill needs a pastor  
who knows something  
about addictions*



*Beth is looking for  
a church that understands  
about childhood trauma*



*John is hoping the church  
has some resources  
for families of addicts*



*Mary is praying her  
pastor knows something  
about sexual abuse*



*Want to help the church become  
a healing place for people in recovery?*

The School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary offers a Master of Arts in Recovery Ministry, an M.Div. with a Specialization in Recovery Ministry and a Certificate Program in Recovery Ministry. We are committed to training leaders for the Christian community who understand the profound importance of addiction, abuse and trauma for all aspects of Christian life and ministry. If you are looking for post-graduate training that is serious about being part of the solution, we invite you to consider the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry.

*www  
•  
fuller  
institute  
•  
org*

*Continued from Page 3*

involved with the recovery movement from the very beginnings. A.A. was not created out of nothing. The early A.A. groups did not think of themselves as a separate organization. Participants understood themselves to be attending Oxford Group meetings, and attendance at a local church was assumed to be a helpful part of recovery. It took several years before A.A. left the umbrella of the Oxford Group; some A.A. groups left more quickly than others. It is impossible to imagine what A.A. or N.A. or any of the existing Twelve Step fellowships would be like today if they had not been supported and encouraged by thousands of local churches.

Today there is an enormous amount of creativity in the Christian recovery movement. People are trying lots of new strategies, new approaches to old problems. Recovery ministries have formed in churches from a wide range of theological traditions, everything from jump-and-shout charismatic churches to stay-in-your-pews Presbyterian churches. No two churches seem to do recovery ministry in exactly the same way. I am convinced that, to be effective, a recovery ministry must be adapted to the specific traditions, values and vision of a local faith community. There doesn't seem to me to be a one-size-fits-all design that will work effectively in every church.

One of the more interesting developments in the last few years has been the emergence of churches where recovery is central to the life of the congregation. Each congregation of this kind is different. As the interview with Jo Campe in this issue of STEPS illustrates, the process of becoming a "recovery church" or a recovery-friendly church is often full of surprises.

God is not finished yet. Not with me. Not with you. And not with the church.

*You are invited to attend*

# STEPS 2005



Growing together  
in the love and  
grace of God

The National Association for Christian Recovery,  
Lake Avenue Church and  
the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry  
invite you to

## STEPS 2005 *Spirituality & the Healing Journey*

June 23-25, 2005  
at Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, California  
(preconference workshops on Wednesday, June 22)

Call for Workshop Proposals: see page 8.  
Interested organizational sponsors please contact  
Dale Ryan (714-529-6227 ext 113) for details.

A time for nourishment, support, and celebration.  
A time for sharing experience, strength and hope.  
Put it on your calendar today!

*"Humility is when I stop fighting reality."*

### The National Association for Christian Recovery

A Ministry of  
Christian Recovery International  
P. O. Box 215  
Brea, CA 92822-0215

Non-profit org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Fullerton, CA  
92834  
Permit #288