

'God Confidence' Keeps Austin Chaplain Energized While Ministering to Recovering Addicts

Chaplaincy care

I love being a Chaplain with our DBS Chaplaincy care program for as many reasons as there are different people with their various needs. When I was first called into the ministry, I really felt like God called me to be a minister with a church setting. It was not until I did my Clinical Pastoral Education internship at local mental health hospital that I discovered my true calling of pastoral care. When my CPE supervisor told us five, green seminarian students to go to the various units of the hospital, we were all nervous, but I had a confidence in that hospital setting that could only have been God given. That feeling of what I call "God confidence" has not left me. I look to the scripture in Luke, regarding service, where Jesus says,

"In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' Those who are among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves."

I love this scripture because it is about service to others and not to myself. I feel like the friends of the people.

I have the unique opportunity to work as a DBS Chaplain as a 'friend of the people' at Austin Recovery in Austin, Texas. I work primarily with the women's residential treatment center, which is a 30-day program; a women's residential extended program, which is a 90-day program; and a program called "Family House," where women with children up to the age of six can enter treatment. All of the women are in residence to address their alcohol and drug addiction, which is sometimes also related to eating disorders and other possible mental health issues. However, drugs and alcohol are what have brought them to the humbling action of asking for help and temporarily leaving the lives they knew to enter a world of surrender, trust, and hope for a cleaner, saner, and brighter future.

Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, described his conversion from the depths of alcohol addiction as having experienced the dark night of the soul. This is the point where it seems that God is shining a light that clearly penetrates the darkness, which can happen once or many times until the experience registers in our minds and souls. I believe all the women that enter treatment have experienced this life-changing event. As a DBS Chaplain, I am there to walk with them during that vulnerable time of darkness and be there as a witness to another way of life. A spiritual transformation is the only recognized solution for addicts and alcoholics to be in remission from their disease of alcohol and drug addiction, since there is no cure.

Most of the women I meet at Austin Recovery either never experienced any kind of religious

experience growing up or had gone to church and left the church for various reasons. For instance, “Tiffany” had gone to church for a time when she was a child and enjoyed the community of church. But as she got older and experienced many difficult changes in her family life, she turned to drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with these stresses. She felt too guilty to attend church, or she was just too hung over after a Saturday night of partying left her feeling separate from God, church, and anything that had to do with spirituality. “Tina,” described hating church, because she was forced to attend by an angry and abusive father. As a result, she believed she couldn’t trust God and believe that God was caring and loving. When she grew up, she left the church as fast as she could. Fifteen years later, she found herself homeless, lonely, scared, and just wanting to die. The dark night of the soul had met her head on.

These are just two small examples of the spiritual challenges of addicts and alcoholics. When I first introduce myself to the women, we are in what we call a community meeting, which consists of about 25-40 women, some of whom have babies. To envision the setting, think of the examples above and multiply by 20. I make the best attempt possible to tell them about what a DBS Chaplain is and what I am not. I emphasize, though, that I am trying to help them rebuild or build for the first time a caring, loving, and powerful relationship with God, regardless of their past experiences. Having been humbled by addiction, they can be saved by grace. As the psalmist aptly affirms in Psalm 31, “In panic I cried out, ‘I am cut off from the Lord!’ But you heard my cry for mercy and answered my call for help.”

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