

Where Hope Grows

Recovery Mass aims to bring grace for families, those with addictions

Story by Mary Morrell, Contributing Editor

“The bumper sticker on the car in front of me reads ‘Happy, Joyous & Free,’” reflects “Jerry.”

The quote is from the book of Alcoholics Anonymous and identifies the three “gifts that the 12-step program, and more importantly, the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, has given to me.”

Often, “folks who read this bumper sticker will find the words simply denoting a positive statement of how to live life. But ... the likelihood is that the person who proudly displays this [message] was once at the brink of losing all hope due to an addiction,” he says.

“Jerry,” who wishes to remain anonymous, was at that point once, but today, like innumerable others, is on the hope-filled, lifelong journey of recovery due to what he calls “divine inspiration,” and his own commitment to heal, supported in great part by people of faith.

Recognizing the critical value of such support, the diocesan Department of Pastoral Care will sponsor a diocesan-wide Recovery Mass at 7 p.m. Sept. 17 in St. Robert Bellarmine Co-Cathedral, Freehold. The theme of the evening, which includes refreshments and fellowship in the parish hall following Mass, is “Grace for the Journey.” Father Robert S. Grodnicki, pastor of St. Luke Parish, Toms River, will serve as celebrant.

“The Recovery Mass is for persons in recovery, or those with family members, or loved ones who are in recovery, or who wish to be in recovery,” said Deanna Sass, diocesan director of Pastoral Care. “It is meant to be a source of great spiritual help, strength and grace for the recovery journey. We believe that the Mass, the source and summit of our Catholic faith, provides us with abundant grace.”

“Everything that the latest research has affirmed is that persons of faith – who believe in a higher power [God] and are part of a faith community that offers prayer support – are more likely to be successful in working on their recovery than those who do not,” she said.

Recovery Journey

Early in his recovery, Jerry connected with the Hope Addictions Ministry in St. James Parish, Pennington. He recently shared some thoughts on his recovery journey with Theresa Hank, co-founder of the program with her husband, Deacon Moore Hank.

“At the core of being happy, joyous and free is a spiritual awakening and a cleansing of the body, mind, and soul,

[but] the deeper I sank into my drink, the more I was isolated, empty and afraid inside,” he shared. “This, in turn, led to a void of any genuine spirituality. All aspects of who I was would be sacrificed to my disease. I became spiritually and physically wilted and lost any desire to connect with others, even my closest friends and family. ...

“Fortunately, God still had a plan for me and did not give up hope in me even though I had abandoned hope in myself.

The hope came ... in a simple thought that awakened a fading sense of goodness that flickered inside my soul.

[It] was a reality check that challenged my complacent acceptance of my disease and its impending outcome. How can it be okay to rob my wife of a husband and my children of a father,

by sacrificing loving years together to a

drink? This was the divine intervention that brought me to my knees and into the rooms of AA, where I asked for the help I needed when I could not help myself. This was also the beginning of my spiritual awakening.

“Today I have peace that I am following God’s will and there is a reason and a purpose that I may not always understand, but I know is part of his greater plan. ... Life can be challenging, and living in accordance to the principles of AA is not always an easy task; but with the acceptance of God’s will in my life, I have found much peace and have begun to experience a happy, joyous and free life.”

Having Hope

Sass explained that the Recovery Mass is a natural next step following the statewide turnout and response to the diocesan-sponsored addiction symposium held in September 2018 that addressed the role of the Catholic parishes in supporting recovery.

“Since September is National Recovery Month, we knew we wanted to keep the momentum going,” she said.

In hosting the Recovery Mass, Sass extended a broad invitation and stressed a message to all those on the recovery journey: “Your Church loves you. You teach us so much about resilience, strength, perseverance and the willingness to try again and again. We want you to know that we are with you, we pray with you and for you, and we need you to be among us. You remind us that the Light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

“We all battle temptations; we all have life challenges; we all sin and are weak when we wish we could be strong. Your recovery journey gives all of us hope. And we are truly grateful for your example,” she said.

i For a list of parish-based addiction/recovery ministries in the Diocese, visit the online version of this story at TrentonMonitor.com and click on News>Parishes.

IF YOU GO

- ▶ **WHAT:** A Recovery Mass – Grace for the Journey
- ▶ **WHEN:** 7 p.m. Sept. 17
- ▶ **WHERE:** St. Robert Bellarmine Co-Cathedral, 61 Georgia Road, Freehold.

MORE INFORMATION: Visit <https://dioceseoftrenton.org/addictions-ministry>



“God still had a plan for me and did not give up hope in me.”



PRAYERS AROUND • Marie Mylod receives a blessing from Conventual Franciscan Father Brennan Joseph Farleo at the Aug. 18 prayer service in St. Peter Church, Point Pleasant Beach. Joining in the prayer are John and Rose Viragh. The service was for family of those suffering from addiction, as well as those with addiction. Lois Rogers photo

Point Pleasant Beach healing service for addiction draws 100-plus

By Lois Rogers
Correspondent

Conventual Franciscan Father Brennan Joseph Farleo drew from his own family experience with addiction as he shared how faith can move mountains for those in crisis as well as their families.

Father Farleo, guardian in residence in St. Peter Parish, Point Pleasant Beach, explained that his own brother, Joseph, had become addicted to opioids when suffering intense back pain after an accident and subsequent surgery that left him paralyzed.

Deeply religious Charismatic family members urged his brother to turn to prayer and healing services, which led to him overcoming his addiction.

“He spent the rest of his life praising the Lord,” Father Farleo said, explaining that his brother died six years ago from cancer. “I can’t say it loud enough or strong enough. God loves you – don’t be afraid to come out of the dark and into the light.”

Love and Compassion

More than 100 people of all generations were in attendance Aug. 18 as Father Farleo led a healing prayer service in the church for those suffering from addictions and their families.

Hosted by the parish and the Secular Franciscans of St. Maximilian Kolbe, the service was timed to coincide with the Aug. 14 Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe, patron saint of those suffering from addiction. The Franciscan friar offered his life in place of a prisoner in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Throughout the service, the faithful joining in intercessory prayer, sacred song, reflection, the laying on of hands and the opportunity to pray with and be blessed by a relic of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

During the service, Father Farleo stressed that fear of revealing an addiction doesn’t have to keep those suffering from seeking help. “What Jesus Christ is telling you today is, ‘Don’t be afraid to open the door. Don’t be afraid to stop wallowing in emptiness and guilt, and realize how much God loves you and that his mercy knows no bounds,’” he said.

For those who wonder how God could love them through addiction, “Jesus Christ looks at you and says, ‘I love you right where you are. I want you to come here and feel the warmth of my Sacred Heart,’” Father Farleo

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