



COMMUNITY, FAITH LEADERS LEARN PREVENTION, ABUSE SKILLS

Dozens gather at Monroe church to focus on northeast Louisiana alcohol, drug addiction issues with solution plans

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Drew Brooks scanned the room at Walk in the Word Family Church and asked a series of questions to determine who was attending a special Thursday (Oct. 25) event. There were pastors, clergy, ministers, coalition members, community representatives, prevention specialists and others.

All were at the Monroe, Louisiana, church to learn how to better deal with alcohol, drug and other addiction abuse and prevention. Hosted by the Northeast Delta Human Services Authority, dozens of people attending the Faith Partnership Readiness Training led by Brooks, CEO of Faith Partners, and Dr. Monteic A. Sizer, executive director of the authority. The goal: Prevent and reduce and eliminate alcohol, drug and other addictions while helping individuals who need help.

“Today’s training was all about taking a deeper dive into the work we do,” explained Sizer. “We’re a government agency serving thousands of citizens in 12 parishes, and we cannot do it alone. We need help from the faith communities. We have to go where the people are, and meet individuals where they – and their families – are.”

The training included representatives from the Baptist Church, the Church of God in Christ, Lutheran, non-denominational and other faith groups. The dozens of participants said they wish others had joined them.

“I wish there was some kind of alarm I could sound because a lot of our churches are asleep,” said Carolyn Hunt of Walk in the Word.

“This is why we’re working with houses of faith,” added Sizer. “We have to do everything we can to help our people who hurt and to help people who don’t to avoid hurting with prevention. Establishing hope and purpose stops a person from drinking and taking drugs.”

Brooks said the group is the core of what to come. He said they are the pioneers, the leaders who will create the infrastructure others will join. Brooks deliberately involved each participant in general discussion and table-specific and small group exercises. An experienced facilitator and trainer, Brooks and Faith Partners have used an evidence-based intervention approach in more than 600 congregational teams with about 20 different faith traditions in more than 25 states.

Working through elements of denial, including ignorance, fear and pride, Brooks identified solutions, including education, skill development and providing safe environments. He said church leaders do not need to be afraid, in part because research shows that spirituality plays a strong role with healing.

Sizer said other church and faith leaders are welcome to join the initiative any time between now and the next training opportunity, most likely in late January or February. “This is not a one-time event,” he said.

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