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New faith-based support group begins at First Christian

By ASHLEY COOK
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Most everyone, if they're honest with themselves, has a hurt, a hangup or a habit.

That's where Celebrate Recovery comes in. It's a new faith-based support group forming through First Christian Church in Lufkin reaching out to those suffering substance abuse — and beyond.



Ashley Cook/The Lufkin Daily News (ENLARGE)

Jim Riggs is a volunteer with Celebrate Recovery, a new faith-based support group offered Friday evenings at First Christian Church in Lufkin. The ministry uses eight principles and 12 steps based on Christian healing toward recovery for people suffering addictive, compulsive and dysfunctional behaviors.

Addiction to drugs and alcohol are well-recognized issues. But the ministry is also designed for people with other addictions, such as food, shopping, pornography, or anything else compulsive and dysfunctional people are dealing with — often in response to painful personal experiences, according to Jim Riggs, ministry spokesman.

"(It's) anything separating people from where they could be in their relationship with Jesus Christ," Riggs said.

Celebrate Recovery began in 1991 at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., the vision of a man named John Baker. Beginning with an initial meeting of 45 people at that church, the ministry has spread across the country and around the world.

California has adopted the program into its state prison system, as has New Mexico, according to a statement by Saddleback Church.

"We are part of a movement that is bringing the hurting and broken to the healing power of Jesus Christ," the church wrote.

Baker himself was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, according to Riggs. Baker liked the 12-step program, but wanted something that went beyond merely acknowledging a "higher power," to something that recognized Jesus as that power, Riggs said.

Celebrate recovery takes 12 steps similar to what is used in AA, and connects each step to a biblically based principle. For example, step one is admitting one's powerlessness over addictions and compulsive behaviors, that life has become unmanageable.

The accompanying verse is Romans 7:18, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

The steps move members through self-searching, appealing to God for healing, making amends to those wronged, seeking self-accountability and a deeper walk with God, and finally using the experience to reach out to others.

The program also includes a road to recovery with eight principles based on the eight Beatitudes from the Bible, based on RECOVERY as an acronym. The final "Y" is for "yield," as in, "yield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and by my word," followed by the beatitude, "Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires."

The ministry is not therapy. It is not a place for control, a place to be rescued, for perfection or a quick fix, according to a Celebrate Recovery pamphlet. What it is a safe place to share, a refuge, a place to belong, to be respected while learning and growing, taking off your mask to reach a possible turning point in your life.

Riggs said he was inspired to look at offering a faith based support group after hearing a talk by state District Judge Paul White about the Drug Court program, and the need for community help fighting the pervasive drug problem in Angelina County. Drug Court, overseen by White, uses intense court-based supervision to help non-violent offenders overcome addictions. Participants attend daily or weekly support groups, often using faith based options.

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White said he was elated whenever the community responds to needs, such as the new group at First Christian.

When Drug Court began a couple of years ago, there were only one or two faith-based support groups in Angelina County. Now there are up to none or 10, White said.

That shows the type of community this is, and the type of believers in the community, according to White.

"(Believers) that just don't talk, but they do the walk as well, and that's what church out to be all about — serving," White said.

Riggs said it was that call to active ministry he was responding to.

At First Christian, church members are a part of the In His Steps program, where they pledge to take part in a service activity, Riggs said. Sixteen have already signed up to help with Celebrate Recovery.

Worshipping once a week and attending Bible study is great, but it isn't enough, according to Riggs.

"As a Christian, I feel like we're called to do what the Bible says, as well as believe in and study the Bible," Riggs said.

Riggs said they ran the idea by their senior minister, the Rev. Mike Hunter, who approved the new venture. The group began training last Fall.

White said that people need to recognize drug problem and deal with them, hopefully by getting over the embarrassment of it and turning to loving church members for support. If they don't, he said, they are only prolonging the inevitable step of facing the ultimate confrontation in a court of law.

"We need to come out of our closets and be willing to participate in whatever role ...," White said.

"It's going to be one or the other, and hopefully they choose the former."

Celebrate Recovery meetings begin with dinner, followed by praise and worship, before breaking off into men's and women's small groups — substance-abuse and non-substance abuse. Afterward, the groups come together for coffee and dessert. Meetings are a safe environment, with respect for confidentiality and privacy, Riggs said.

"Here you are with people who have similar struggles, and who find the strength ... to deal with those issues," Riggs said.

Celebrate Recovery meets Friday nights in the Fellowship Hall at First Christian Church, 1300 S. First St.

Dinner is 6 p.m. and is free today only, \$3 for dinners on subsequent Fridays, and includes dinner, drink and dessert.

Praise and worship is 7 p.m., small groups are at 8 p.m. and coffee and dessert is 9 p.m. Child care is available. Call 936-634-8341 for information or visit the ministry link online at www.fcclufkin.com.

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