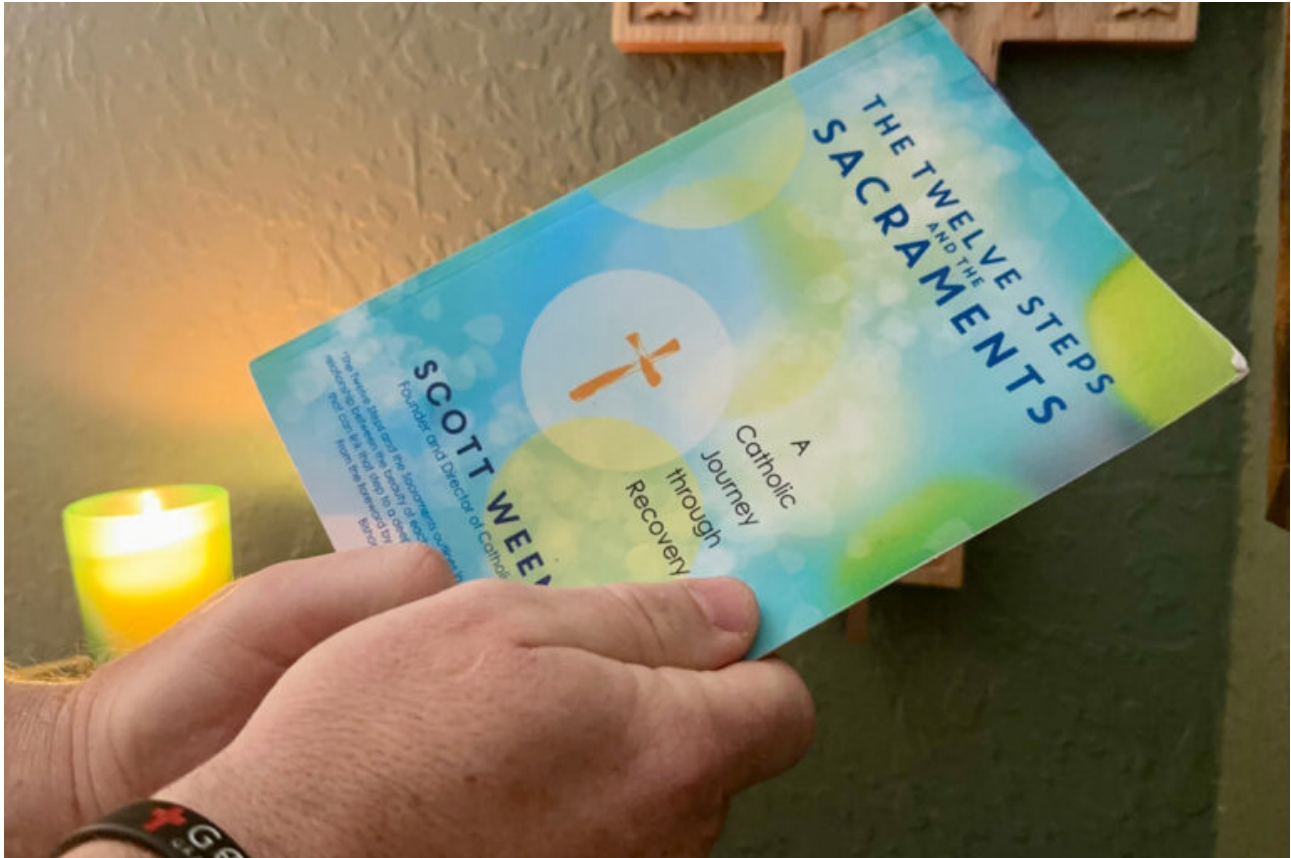


Struggling Catholics addiction support in Charleston

written by Maryanne Meyerriecks |



A new recovery ministry is in the Diocese of Little Rock, and a small parish in Franklin County is the first to host meetings.

Sacred Heart Church in Charleston, 20 miles east of Fort Smith, has Catholic in Recovery meetings every Sunday at 6 p.m. in the parish center. The program combines two powerful sources of grace, the sacraments of the Church and 12-step recovery programs.

George, a Sacred Heart parishioner and oblate of Subiaco Abbey, learned about Catholic in Recovery from his sponsor in a secular 12-step group.

"I was beginning to work on the fourth step, and my sponsor, who is non-Catholic, encouraged me to approach this step from a Catholic point of view," said George, who asked that his last name not be published. "I had a tendency to become cross-addicted, immersing myself in other addictions when I gained sobriety from alcohol.

"Religion had become a cross-addiction for me in the past, and I'd worn myself out volunteering, praying the rosary multiple times a day and going to daily Mass. All addiction is trauma-based and in discussing it with my pastor, Father Norm (McFall), he felt this program would provide additional support for people struggling with alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, co-dependency and other issues."

They received encouragement from the diocese to launch the ministry and held its first meeting in February. About 10 people attend each week. Meetings are open to anyone with an addiction or family and friends of addicts.

“Some of our members belong to 12-step groups specific to their addictions but want the additional support of a group anchored in Catholicism. Others are attending for the first time,” George said. “Our members are dealing with a variety of issues, but the Charleston area is not large enough to provide 12-step programs for every type of addiction.”

Twelve-step virtual groups are available for every type of addiction through the various “anonymous” groups. CatholicinRecovery.com also offers some addiction-specific virtual groups that meet weekly.

Through CatholicinRecovery.com, members can visit virtual groups to pray the rosary, study the steps through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and more. The national organization is promoting a Lenten challenge, “40 Meetings in 40 Days,” whether virtual or in-person.

“We are the first parish in Arkansas to offer Catholic in Recovery,” Father McFall said. “Sacred Heart chose to initiate CIR at our parish to, on the one hand, offer a general recovery meeting through the lens of the Catholic faith for our community. On the other hand, we pray that this local meeting will be the ‘seed’ to encourage other local meetings throughout the Diocese of Little Rock.”

The meeting structure is similar to other 12-step groups, with a few additional steps.

“We begin each meeting by reciting the Serenity Prayer and the Our Father and end each meeting with the Prayer of St. Francis,” George said. “We read the 12 steps and meeting guidelines, focusing on honesty, sharing personal experiences, listening to one another without trying to give advice or make judgments and maintaining confidentiality.”

Before open sharing begins, the group reads Sunday’s Gospel and a written reflection relating the Gospel passage to their real-life struggles with addiction. Sharing is guided by three questions:

-What kind of radical changes were made in your life to help free you from the darkness of addiction?

-What helped you recognize that you could not manage life on your own, and how did you seek God’s help?

-What are the tools that God is using to rebuild a new foundation for your life?

“The sacraments of the Church are represented in the 12 steps,” George said. “Steps 1-3 are associated with baptism, as we are newbies in recovery. Steps 4-9, which deal with moral inventories and making amends, are associated with reconciliation. Steps 10 and 11, dealing with prayer, meditation and our relationship to God, is represented by the Eucharist, and the 12th step, reaching out to others and incorporating these practices in our lives, focuses on confirmation.”

One meeting attendee said “God” can’t be mentioned in traditional 12-step groups, with preference given to the term “higher power.”

“It’s good to be able to share with people who share my faith,” he said.

Father McFall said there is a need for Catholic in Recovery and invites Catholics in nearby parishes to attend the Charleston meetings.

Catholic in Recovery is hosting a retreat at Subiaco Abbey Nov. 1-3. For more information, visit catholicinrecovery.com/events.