



Parish Health Ministry

Success Spotlight:
Health Advocate Nurse and Celebrate Recovery Trainer,
Rev. Rhonda Johnson, BSN, RN

These days, most people's lives are incredibly busy, full, and complex. If adequate support or resources (both internal and external) are lacking in a person's life, it can quickly become unbalanced. For some people this lack of balance shows up in their work, and their career may suffer; for others, the lack of balance comes through in unhealthy choices, including addictions. Last fall, Rhonda Johnson, BSN, formerly a coordinator for ERH Parish Health Ministry, found a role where she could help people restore that balance, becoming the Health Advocate Nurse at the Newport Aquarium. Johnson, who's also an ordained minister, feels right at home in this role, which allows her to approach her clients using the six dimensions of wellness – physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, and occupational.

In her role, she has three primary goals: 1) wellness connection – developing connections to help clients access resources, 2) health promotion and education, and 3) bridge to care- matching people to the resources in place, and helping connect clients with programs the company offers their employees. Supports such as this allow Rhonda to do more than simply assess and treat her clients – they allow her to, “walk with them and to journey with them.” Johnson knows, “People aren't just looking for the medical model. They know that here they can talk confidentially and I'll really listen. I have the time here to really brainstorm with them, to support them in making their own choices in health. Their agenda is my agenda.”

In her role as Health and Wellness Director at her church, Stratford Heights Church of God, Rhonda is able to also journey with those in her congregation, serving as part of a team for their Celebrate Recovery ministry. A year ago, she had become increasingly concerned about the rising incidence of addiction within her community, but wasn't quite sure how to address the problem. Someone had mentioned Celebrate Recovery at her church's health cabinet meeting, and after sitting with the idea for awhile, brought it up to her pastor. He supported the idea, but she knew how much work would be involved in doing this ministry successfully. Despite the knowledge of how much time and energy starting this ministry would require, as Johnson explained, “It was like a burr that kept rubbing and rubbing – it simply wouldn't go away.” She and a friend from her congregation, Linda Ingham, started meeting with others to develop a plan, started visiting other Celebrate Recovery ministries across Ohio, then “tapped into God's will” and, with Ingham as the lead, launched their ministry.

In September 2012, after having received immense amounts of training, she and a group of other team members started “practicing.” In January of this year, they opened the meetings to the community at large, and were blown away by the response. The program, “a biblical and balanced program that helps people overcome their hurts, hang-ups, and habits,” was quickly embraced by large numbers of people within Middletown (approximately 100 people at every meeting). Celebrate Recovery allowed people to realize they were not alone, and as Johnson explains, “If a person feels isolated in their pain, they will remain in their pain.” Between her work at the Newport Aquarium and her involvement in the Celebrate Recovery ministry, Rhonda Johnson is helping an incredible number of people realize they are not only valued and supported, but never alone in their pain- something every parish health nurse strives to do.