

Using our Orthodox Faith  
To Battle Alcoholism and  
Addictions

# Confronting anxieties (fear) – a key in understanding addiction and recovery

- The neurotic anxiety
- The historical anxiety
- The existential anxiety

# Addictions, religious experience and grace

- Everyone has a thirst for God = a thirst for love
- Addictions = idols who replace the Holy Spirit from the people' souls.
- Addicts = “idol worshipers of these objects of attachment”
- Addictions are cutting off: freedom, consciousness and responsibility
- Grace = a dynamic spillover of the loving nature of God who can cross the creation in an endless self-giving

# Healthy ethics of religion vs. damaging ethics without religion

## **Our Spiritual needs:**

- Growing relationships with the Holy Spirit
- Periodical “maximum intensity experiences” of the God encounter
- The vital necessity of living a life of purpose and meaning
- Priorities, values and healthy commitments
- Spiritual development = creative wisdom, love and spiritual wealth
- Spiritual resources to feed self-esteem, the courage of forgiveness and healing the soul’s wounds
- Consciousness: caring and loving toward ourselves, the others and the whole creation.

# Healthy ethics of religion vs. damaging ethics without religion

Healthy ethics and religion gives honest answers to:

- Spiritual problems
- Development of consciousness:
  - unity,
  - self-forgiveness,
  - accepting God

In damaging ethics and without religion :

- People live in a land of spiritual waste
- They come back to idols and seductive gods like:
  - The leaders of the occult
  - The worship of success, money and power
  - Alcohol, drugs and other addictive activities

# Spirituality of recovery vs. spirituality of addiction

## **Spirituality in recovery:**

### **Tendencies:**

- Open, flexible, growing
- An existence full of respect, non-manipulative
- Joy, celebration of life
- Love, trust and humility
- Relationships based on respect
- An intimate relationship with creation
- Motivation to “confront” life
- A “love affair” with life

## **Spirituality in addiction:**

### **Tendencies:**

- Closed, rigid
- Magical existence, manipulative, God is adjusted to personal needs
- A deadly, heavy fate
- Guilt, shame, rejection
- Exclusion, rejection, attack
- Alienation
- Preoccupation to protect the status-quo
- Experimenting a new boring life

# Recovery without religion

## Basic principles to reach balance :

- Admitting the status of addict
- Daily acceptance of being addicted, and of the essential condition: the refusal to return to the addictive cycle
- Strengthening the priorities: good health and long life
- Setting the objective to raise the life quality standards
- Mutual trust in the members of the self-help group
- Individual and group responsibility to maintain balance



# Pastoral Counseling in Addiction Recovery

# The need for pastoral counselors

- Pastoral counseling in addictions - a challenge and an opportunity

## Advantages:

- natural access in the family
- the trust of many in the clerics and, so, a direct exposure of their problems
- the confidentiality of the counseling relationship
- money contribution is not involved
- the spiritual power and the support of the religious community

## Disadvantages:

- the attitude of some addicts toward the clergy
- the attitude of some clergy toward the addicts

# Increased opportunities for helping

Factors that can influence the number of opportunities:

- the parish type
- the relationship between clergy and support organizations such as AA, AL-Anon etc.
- the confession to which the cleric belongs to;
- the attitudes of the clerics and public statements;
- the spirit in which the attitudes and the statements are presented;

# Strategies to uncover the “Hidden Addiction”

- planting educational seeds
- informed speech, full of hope and acceptance
- preventive education in church schools
- pastoral care and pre-counseling
- pastoral visits
- pastoral crisis counseling
- counseling and / or referral

# Realistic Goals in addiction counseling

- To strengthen the person in the direction of spiritual growth and to develop his/her God given potential for:
  - a fulfilled personality
  - positive relationships
  - spirituality
  - a productive life of serving God and the community

## The final goal:

- That the alcoholic dependant person has the ability to maintain his sobriety or to moderate his use
- the restoration of the person according to theological doctrine
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# Realistic Objectives in addiction counseling

The operational objectives in pastoral counseling of addicts aim at helping them to:

- Accept the fact that using the psycho-active substances is a problem, and that they need help;
- Obtain / accept the medical treatment;
- Interrupt the addictive cycle and maintain sobriety;
- Continue the personal and spiritual development, including rebuilding their personal lives and their relationships

# Recovery Happens in Community!

Basic resources useful in pastoral counseling of addicts:

**Formal** -counseling / psychotherapy

-medical treatment

-professionals counseling centers

-Alcoholics Anonymous/Al-Anon

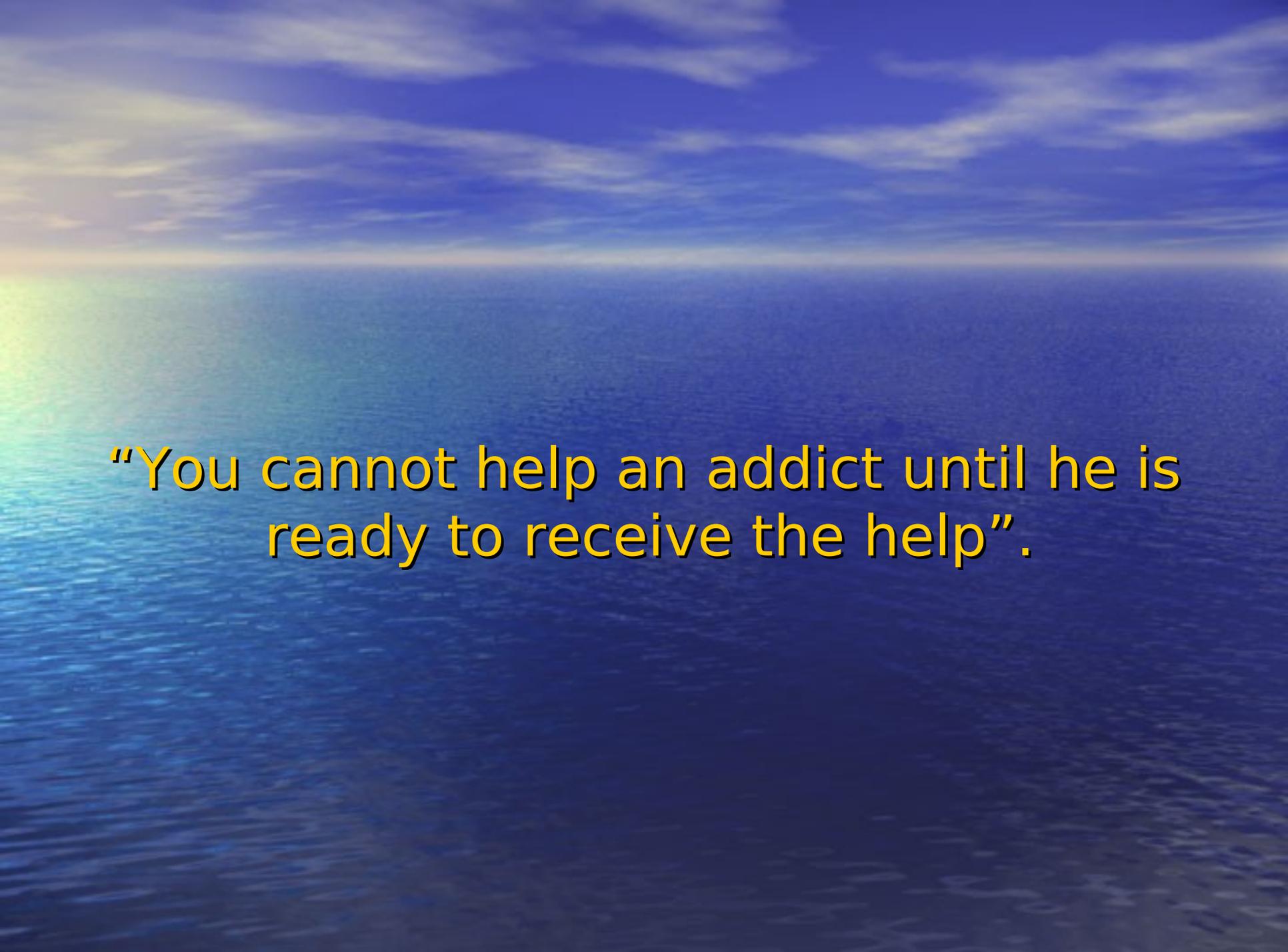
**Informal** - friends, support groups

The multi-disciplinary team:

-internal physician, nutritionist, psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, recovering addict, other priests and clerics, including monks and nuns.

# The Counseling Relationship

- Counseling = an art and a science
- The therapeutic relationship = redeeming
- The counselor = a facilitator of healing and development in relationships
  - active listening = healing listening
  - empathy
  - a non-critical attitude
  - partnership
  - “the mutual principle”
  - accepting the disease concept by the counselor-cleric



“You cannot help an addict until he is ready to receive the help”.

# Motivation is a key in recovery

## Identify the degree and type of motivation

- Recognize and accept the addict's right of not accepting your help; pastoral : respecting the person's freedom is essential to building relationship;
- Avoid relating in ways that can increase without reason the resistance to change; avoid pastoral counseling against the will and only at the family members request; the biblical prototype: DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?

# Strategies for fostering motivation:

- Use any temporary opening toward help by associating with an ex-addict; Mathew the publican became an Evangelist
- Encourage the addict to accept responsibility for their own recovery; the pastoral prototype “Take up your bed, and walk!”
- Avoiding the responsibility of a third party: the pastoral prototype: “Lord, I have no one to put me into the pool”
- Avoid overprotection and establish an autonomous relationship > a heavenly gift received at creation

# Motivation = the key of recovery

- Avoiding the critics of any kind: the pastoral prototype: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged” (Mathew 7,1)
- Respecting the confidentiality > from a pastoral perspective, this is an essential condition to receive the privilege to be a *confessor*;
- Encouraging verbalizing the feelings > The Sacrament of Confession

# Motivation (cont)

- Finding and exploiting the “Achile’s heel” – the place where they are wounded or have hopes for > pastoral: the model “before you were born, I have seen you under the fig tree”.
- Encourage the learning of the mechanisms of temptation > pastoral “the temptation of Jesus”
- Maintaining the empathic relationship > pastoral: the formula of Forgiveness at the Sacrament of Confession; Jesus empathized with the sinner woman: “Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone”.

# The Basics (continued)

- Use the dates and seasons of fasting, meditation and introspection validated by the churches. (Great Lent, Dormition, Christmas)
- Offer behavior models according to the biblical teachings and the church's traditions (the study of saints, scripture, patristic writings)
- Use the personal abilities and the spiritual, liturgical and teaching resources of the religious community in order to offer solutions.

# The basics (cont)

- involvement of the person in activities of biblical meditation, church hymns, liturgical readings in order to stabilize the counseling relationship and to reduce the emotional burdens that are blocking the constructive confrontation.
- Exploring the past experiences in a creative way
- Use of the love-caring-confrontation relationship for an authentic life and relationships

# Spiritual crisis counseling based on the solution problem

- The resources, abilities and strengths of addicts are brought into the light
- The believers with problems are encouraged to seek and implement solutions with the help of spiritual literature adequate to their own problems.
- Finding solutions “here and now”, according to the evangelic model of permanent call addressed to each believer

- Solving the present and future problems using the perspective that a life improved in the present will have as a reward the everlasting life in the Kingdom of Christ;
- Self forgiveness and forgiveness of others
- Approaching the problems related to abusive drinking in terms of family system and in the Christian perspective of balance.

# The objectives of pastoral counseling

- to help people discover their relationship with God in order to overcome their fall in a constructive way
- to guide the addicts toward medical and psychiatric help
- to maintain through the pastoral visits a supportive relationship with the addict and his family

- to encourage and reward through specific means the maintenance of the broken cycle of addiction
- to reveal the desire and the motivation of the addicts resistant to change toward accepting treatment, by consolidating their spiritual awakening
- to support the healing of spiritual and moral wounds of addicts
- to support learning / rebuilding a healthy “life style”, to help addicts renew their lives

# The goals.....

- The double goal: healing the damage of addiction and continuous development of the God given gifts
- Healing both the body and the passion of the soul
- Renewal of the Church through enabling the members of the Orthodox community to start an informal support group inside the community
- Renewing the Church life through the changing power of Grace and of the Sacraments of the Church

# Recovery counseling

- *“ Learn your theories well, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of a living person. Not theories but your own creative individuality alone must decide.”*

Carl Gustav Jung –

“Psychological Reflections”