



PATHWAY

WALKING alongside

strengthening congregational community ministries

»» Mental Health Ministry ««

»» CARE AND COUNSELING CENTER - FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ROSWELL, GA

When people have mental health concerns, they often contact their local pastor for help first. So it made sense that First Baptist Church of Roswell agreed to provide the operating space for a mental health ministry. The counseling ministry grew out of an affiliation between the church and the Georgia Baptist Healthcare System. When the healthcare system went out of business in 2002, its counseling division merged with another pastoral counseling ministry which is now known as the Care and Counseling Center of Georgia (CCCG).

Leading the church's CCCG affiliate is Doyle Hamilton. He has a doctorate in pastoral counseling from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in the state of Georgia. In addition, the American Association of Pastoral Counselors has certified him as a fellow. "I wear two hats, one as a minister and one as a therapist," Hamilton said. In addition to his work at CCCG, Hamilton serves as a part-time staff member at the church directing the church's grief ministry for children called Hope for Grieving Children.

Goals of the ministry

Hamilton's most important mission is to provide mental health education and support for couples, families and individuals. Pastoral counselors integrate spiritual values and behavioral science to help heal the mind, spirit, and human relationships. "I do a lot of psycho-education which is both educational and supportive," he said. This kind of interaction occurs in premarital education, for example.

Funding the ministry

Since he is a staff member at First Baptist Roswell, the church pays for the Hope for Grieving Children ministry and Hamilton's psycho-educational counseling services. Psychological counseling is paid for through the counseling center, with some clients paying for it through insurance or through a subsidy if they cannot afford to pay. Before the current structure was established, billing for counseling was funneled through the church. That billing structure did not work well. Now CCCG is accountable for the billing as well as the filing of insurance.

Recruiting volunteers

The Hope for Grieving Children ministry, which is modeled after the Dougy Center in Portland, Oregon, operates with 10 volunteers that come from both the church and the community. "It's not counseling, but support, and children benefit as much from their peers as they do volunteers," Hamilton said. The rest of the church's counseling services require Hamilton's expertise rather than that of volunteers.

Structure of the program

People who want counseling initiate contact with Hamilton by e-mail or telephone, and counseling services go beyond church members. "They have to say they want to talk," Hamilton said. "It's for anyone in the community regardless of their faith or lack of faith—it's open to anyone. Many I talk to want someone who will respect their faith perspective," he said, noting that clients come to the center from non-Christian faiths or no faith at all.

MORE ON BACK

» Mental Health Ministry «

Clients pay for the services themselves or through their insurance. "Some cannot pay," Hamilton said. "The church has been generous enough to provide counseling assistance for those." Hamilton works with 30 people during some weeks, and 20 in others. That number includes families, couples and individuals. "I have seen it grow," Hamilton said. "What's interesting is that people come and go."

The Hope for Grieving Children program is a support group involving 10 families meeting in six sessions over 12 weeks, and Hamilton works with the adult volunteers. "We provide a variety of venues and outlets for the children to give expression to their grief." This might include collages, painting or drawing.

Promoting the program to the community

With an office located near two other churches, the counseling programs are easy to find. Hamilton and church leaders have no problem spreading the word. "There are three churches on the boulevard here, including a Presbyterian and a Methodist church," he said. "I also do a lot of public speaking in congregations. Because of my pastoral identity, many of the referrals we get are from local clergy." Clients also learn about CCCG locations throughout the state on the CCC Web site, <http://www.cccgeorgia.org/locations-north.html>.

Program as evangelism

Hamilton sees his ministry as an expression of his faith. "My identity is clearly as a pastoral counselor. I don't hide that," he said. "For some people who come that pastoral role is important. Some come and don't want to talk explicitly about faith. And that's fine. But my training and experience is as a pastoral counselor." He also values his role in serving the community, which is something he learned from his father. "My dad is a retired family physician and was a part of his community for over 50 years," Hamilton said. "He modeled service to the entire community. He taught me well by example and I value that part of my calling as a minister."

Stepping Stones

Brief descriptions of how to implement specific ministries. For each of the five broader areas above, many ministries can be envisioned. We have identified a few of these for each area and have articulated the steps for how that ministry might be planned.

Backpacks

The Walking Alongside Web site provides a Backpack of additional resources and examples for this specific ministry. Included are published articles, Web sites, selected books, testimonials and existing ministries with contact information.

Food for the Journey

A short devotional based on scripture that can be used in church bulletins, as a Moment for Mission during worship or as an introduction to a Bible study.