

Catholic in Recovery helps addicts heal through the power of the Faith

“Incomprehensible demoralization” is the phrase that recovering alcoholic and drug addict Scott Weeman uses to describe his experience with addiction.

Chances are good that the average Catholic shares the pew with others who share in this suffering. Per the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the National Institutes of Health, the 2019 death toll for drug overdose in the United States alone surpassed 70,000 people. A 2019 study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association indicated nearly 1.2 million children who have entered foster care since 2000 did so because of parental drug use.

None of this is a surprise to the Church. It has long seen the dangers to the human person in substance abuse. Paragraph 2290 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states that we are called “to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco or medicine.” Paragraph 2291 teaches that the abuse of drugs “inflicts very grave damage on human health and life.”

A Catholic-based program



Scott Weeman, founder of the nonprofit organization Catholic in Recovery, is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Elissa Voss Photography)

In his book, ["The Twelve Steps and the Sacraments: A Catholic Journey Through Recovery"](#) (Ave Maria Press, \$16.95), Weeman writes: "Nothing I did to help myself provided me with more than brief moments of peace. Any temporary tranquility I experienced was followed by a swift return to the bottle or drugs, and everything that I had worked hard for was taken from me. What remained, however, was the one thing that I could not earn – God's loving grace and mercy."

After several years in sobriety, Weeman felt a call to establish a ministry that serves Catholics seeking healing recovery from all offenses against temperance. Thus he began Catholic in Recovery (CIR), a nonprofit organization that offers Catholic spiritual tools to help those suffering from

the effects of addictions, compulsions and unhealthy attachments, including attachments to behaviors such as pornography use, compulsive overeating, and process addictions such as overspending, hoarding and unhealthy relationship patterns.

Catholic in Recovery now offers both in-person and virtual meetings throughout the week. These meetings follow a format similar to what Weeman encountered in secular 12-step recovery groups. However, CIR readings and meditations are based on the coming Sunday's Mass readings. Catholic prayers are included, and members encourage one other to lean on the power of the sacraments and Catholic sacramentals such as the Rosary.

'The Lord loves the addict'

While Weeman returned to his Catholic faith as part of his journey toward sobriety, there are many Catholics and their loved ones who are affected by active addiction.

Marcia, a Catholic in Recovery member in Columbus, Ohio, admitted, "I got kicked out of my church for drinking altar wine and teaching Bible studies high."

When her parish priest advised her to get into recovery for substance abuse, he helped her discover a local, in-person CIR meeting. She now also attends several virtual CIR meetings per week, often serving as a meeting leader and helping others to take service positions, as well.

Because she was already a practicing Catholic when she joined CIR, Marcia said she experiences in the meetings a new level of God's devotion to her.

"The Lord loves the addict. He knows. I think he's sorry that we are [addicted]," she said. "He loves us so much. I think that there's a lot of sympathy, and all we need to do is ask. [CIR] is all about healing. As an addict, I felt like there was a place for me."

In addition to weekly meetings and reflection materials, Catholic in Recovery is preparing a series of healing retreats for the remainder of 2022. Building on the success of recent CIR retreats in Wichita, Kansas, and Eugene, Oregon, the upcoming retreats will take place in Akron, Ohio, in August, Newton, New Jersey, in September and back in Wichita in November.

CIR retreats provide participants opportunities to receive healing from the effects of addiction through access to fellowship with others in similar situations, as well as through the grace and mercy to be found in Catholic sacramental life. Emily W., a member of CIR based in New Jersey, was so moved by her experience at the 2021 CIR retreat in Wichita that she decided to organize the Newton retreat in addition to starting an in-person CIR group at a nearby parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace in Branchville, New Jersey.

During her retreat experience, Emily experienced a new freedom in her addiction recovery. "Here in CIR, we can say it like it is," Emily said. "The healing is in confession, in the sacraments, in our Catholic faith." Regarding how the CIR retreat inspired her to organize both a retreat and a group local to her, Emily said: "I felt that because it was such a gift to me, I wanted to share it, because I know this is how people with addictions get better. I just knew that I had to share this, because it's from God, and people can heal."

'God truly loves me'

Peter W., who also attended the 2021 Wichita retreat, describes his Catholic in Recovery experience as providing him with an awakening of joy and gratitude. "Like most addicts, I lived this double life, trying to live the Catholic faith while being embroiled in addiction, all the deception that goes with that, all the suffering. I drifted away from my faith for periods of time."

At the retreat, he received a whole new experience of God's personal love for him.

"God truly loves me, individually, personally," Peter said. "I never really believed that. I always thought he loved me anonymously, just one Catholic in millions. I really didn't want him to know me. I was always trying to hide. When I got to Wichita, that was like a crucible moment. I finally heard it. I had all these people with me, and they struggled with the same thing. So I realized that God truly loves me."

Julie, a recovering alcoholic from Texas, attended the 2021 Wichita CIR retreat with her husband, Tom.

Regarding what attendees can expect to experience at the retreat, Julie said that "everyone's friendly and welcoming. Someone who maybe thinks they have a problem, they can come listen to stories and share their story and gain some confidence. [Going on a retreat] is a scary step to take. The more you know you're going to feel welcomed and fed well and treated like an adult, the more comfortable it is. You're allowed to ask questions. It's an open discussion."

Tom, as a family member of a recovering alcoholic, had a different experience. "I really saw another side of [Julie]. When you're a family member or spouse, you just want to be loved and have them love you, and in their weird, ugly way, they are loving you in their alcoholism. Going through [the retreat], I gained more understanding."

Frances, from Oklahoma, is a veteran of 12-step recovery and had her first experience with Catholic in Recovery at the Wichita retreat. She described her biggest takeaway from this introduction to Catholic addiction recovery saying, "'Relief' is the word that comes to me, that feeling of not being alone, that there are other people out there with the same concerns and hopes."

She also described how the power of the sacraments were at

work on the retreat.

“The reconciliation services, that’s where people were really touched,” Frances said. “The priests who were there were very familiar with the 12 steps and hearing confessions. I heard from fellow retreatants how freeing that was. The Mass, the laughter, the tears, the release of emotions and feeling the love of fellow Catholics in recovery was part of feeling God’s love for us.”

Her husband has already made plans to attend the CIR Wichita retreat in November.

Additional retreats in Alabama and other locations are in the works. For more information about Catholic in Recovery retreats, meetings and other support materials, visit their website at catholicinrecovery.com.

Erin McCole Cupp writes and speaks about spiritual tools for survivors of family abuse and dysfunction. Learn more about her mission to heal trauma with truth at erinmccolecupp.com.