

JONESVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A UNITED METHODIST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



STIGMA TAKES AWAY HOPE AND LIFE (STAHL)

Supporting Addiction Recovery for Individuals and Families
in Our Congregation

Sermon Presented by Phyllis A. Mullaney

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Good morning:

The United Methodist Church's 2016 Book of Resolutions #3042, states: **"congregations are to demonstrate active concern relative to the widespread abuse of alcohol and other drugs."**

Therefore, our church has established a committee to comply with the Resolution's direction called STAHL. I would like to thank Pastor Youngjae, the Council and STAHL committee members for their support as I address this issue today. A special thanks to our consultants John Daubney and Robert Lindsey.

The sermon today will be unusual as it will focus on addiction education and the miracle of recovery. Although I will focus on the disease of alcoholism; all addictions have common traits and symptoms.

Let us agree that ***no one woke up on day and decided to be an alcoholic or addict, marry an alcoholic or choose employment with an addicted boss.*** Stigma places shame on those with addiction. That imposed shame prevents millions of individuals and families from seeking and receiving help and support which they so deserve.

STAHL is a German word that means steel. Stigma's are created early in childhood. Like steel stigmas are composed of many elements in order to create the end result. The word **STAHL** spelled **S T A H L** is also an acronym for **Stigma Takes Away Hope and Life.**

The scripture today is from 1Corinthians 10:13:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. The word of God for the people of God.

The scripture in Corinthians warns us of temptation. But we think we are stronger and we will avoid the consequences of succumbing to temptation.... even though we are unable to tell beforehand what is..... **"beyond our ability."** Mercifully, the Scripture also states that it will provide (notice it doesn't say promise) a way of escape.

If you ever want to see the devil in action, it is to know a once decent human in late stage alcoholism as I have. The disease takes over their mind, body and soul and destroys anything in its way to acquire the next drink. Their loved ones become obsessed with the insanity that they can control and cure the disease.

Here are some basic facts about addiction:

- More than **23.5 million** Americans are addicted to alcohol and drugs
- That's approximately **1 in every 10** Americans over the age of 12
- Regrettably, **only 1 in 10 who suffer from addiction receive appropriate treatment**
- The disease of addiction kills **155,300 people** die each year —
88,000 from alcohol and 67,300 from all other drugs combined – **425 per day**.

Based on these statistics, 1 out of 10 people in our congregation are addicted to alcohol or other drugs; some actively addicted, while others are living in recovery.

And, what about the family? One addicted person adversely effects 10 other people physically, mentally and spiritually. Therefore, it is safe to say most everyone in the congregation has been effected by this disease in one way or another. Today, since I was married to a person who was alcoholic, I will make the alcoholic in my talk a male. But everything I say can be applied to most people who are addicted, male or female and their families.

I am frequently asked; how can you tell if someone has a problem with alcohol or other drugs? It is fairly simple.... if a person's drinking or drugging is causing problems (work, family, health, emotional, legal or financial) and they continue to drink or use, it is a problem.

We learned at an early age to avoid the drunk uncle and to walk on the other side of the street if we saw the town drunk. The belief was and is that alcoholic people are weak willed and selfish. Afterall, if they wanted to stop drinking or drugging, they could. Women alcoholics were judged more harshly with despicable names and assumptions.

But the man that **you** might have known, who has a problem with alcohol or other drugs, is a husband and father. **His** family often vacationed with friends in the neighborhood. He had a good job, beautiful family was smart, generous, funny, helpful, and an outstanding member of the community. But after his second DUI a "little drinking problem" was now embarrassing and his old friends saw him no longer as an asset and have drifted away, too often, without a word of help.

Now the ostracized family is living in a secret Hell. The husband says he will never drink or drug again and fails to keep his promise. Bills are piling up; the children hide when their parents are fighting. The children often see the screaming mother at fault. After all, dad just comes home

eats and passes out. Or, they are angry with her for not leaving him so they could live a normal life. Addiction takes total control of the entire family.

Unlike other drugs, the disease of alcoholism can take many years to progress to the point that it is intolerable. The result is the family is led to believe, by the disease's words and actions, that they are the cause of his drinking. Every time they try to control the disease, they failed. Even the children can believe that they are the cause of the drinking. Adult children often marry someone who is alcoholic or an addict or, because of their predisposition to the disease, become alcoholics or addicts themselves.

As time goes by, the family is shunned by their church, community and friends even though many know that the problem has something to do with drinking or drugs. The family is lost and have no idea what to do. And finding someone with addiction specific training can be difficult.

In my family, my husband and his three Irish Catholic brothers were riddled with the disease of alcoholism and passed it on to several of their children. This hereditary truth was addressed in 1887 by Dr. Kellogg author of **The First Book on Physiology and Hygiene**. In 1951, 64 years later, the American Medical Association (AMA), recognized alcoholism as a hereditary disease. Dr Kellogg also identified the symptoms of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) 86 years before women were warned that drinking during pregnancy could harm their babies.

As we discussed earlier alcoholism kills more people than all other drugs combined. Why is this disease still incurable 133 years after Dr.Kellogg's, diagnosis and predictions were published, 85 years after Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was started and 64 years after Al-Anon and Alateen Family Groups began?

Robert J. Lindsey, former President and CEO of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence shares the following: Liquor lobbyists represent 248 separate companies. Statistics in 2018 indicate that they spent **\$30.4 million dollars** to influence legislation and policy relative to the sale of alcohol. The alcohol-beverage industry spends over **\$2 billion dollars a year** on print, broadcast and social media to advertise their products.

STAHL consultant John Daubney a retired Certified Alcohol and Substance Counselor offers this advice: ***"To attempt to shame, manipulate, reason with, give the cold shoulder to, treat with disdain or plead with an alcoholic to stop drinking will almost always meet with failure because the alcoholic, without help, is powerless over their disease and self-loathing where it concerns the addiction. They may stop for a bit, but most likely their distorted thinking and physical dependency will return them to that, which he or she believes, makes their life***

manageable. And you as a friend, parent, spouse, employer etc. will only become hopeless and feeling helpless and responsible yourself."

I hope all this background discussion has been helpful, please **let me tell you my story.**

My husband Dusty was an alcoholic as was my father. I knew my Dad loved me but the only time I heard the words from him was on his death bed. His mother believed it was a sin to drink. As children we thought it was great fun to hide all the beer bottles before dad's staunch Methodist mother and 32nd degree Mason father came to visit. I had great respect for my Dad but I was confused about the quite friction that always seemed to be present. I never saw my Dad drunk. I did not associate his drinking with my confusion until much later in my recovery.

My husband, Dusty, was emotionally distant similar to my Dad. You see I was attracted to what felt normal and familiar. As Dusty's disease progressed, I would complain to friends and family but they never suggested help or understood my love hate relationship with Dusty. Part of the problem was everyone loved Dusty. They didn't seem to get embarrassed by his jokes about me or his inappropriate comments. They probably thought what a lucky woman I was to have this charming man as my husband. In the end, I was very lucky!

I knew nothing about the disease of alcoholism. In 13 years of active alcoholism that progressed (as it will) I would call Dusty an alcoholic as it was the meanest thing I could think to say in anger and frustration. Richard Feynman, a Nobel Peace Prize winning physicist and educator said: ***"I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something."***

One night, after another horrible argument at a bar, I left to walk 8 miles home from Colonie to Voorheesville in an evening gown, high heels and a floor length black cape adorned with my finest jewelry. It didn't take long for a police car to appear. I told them that I was OK and just walking home. They didn't think that was a sane idea and got me a cab. That night when I walked into my house, I knew my mind was totally out of control and could no longer be trusted. I had poured the booze down the sink, cried, prayed, beg and pleaded. I had changed everything about myself to stop him from drinking. **The disease had finally taken my soul.** At that moment, I no longer knew what I was capable of doing. **I called 911 and asked for help.**

During my stay in the Albany Med Psychiatric ward, I was told that a psychiatrist was coming to see me. I developed a strategy. My strategy was to show the psychiatrist that I was fine. Just as the alcoholic is in denial the family members are too. The day the psychiatrist was to arrive I

was dressed in my leopard print, silk pajamas, every hair in place, makeup applied perfectly, and high heel, white satin slippers adorned with matching silk pom poms. When he appeared, he would understand just by looking at me that I was fine. Of course, there was that niggling feeling he might know about my unwillingness to eat and a dramatic loss in weight. But I would make sure he understood that if Dusty would just stop drinking my life would be perfect. The Psychiatrist's name was Jesse. I looked at him and said to myself **"I've got this!"**... He studied me and probably thought to himself "I am going to know this lady for a very long time." I was like the golden ring.... job security!

"Recovery for me and my husband Dusty was a myriad of miracles."

Miracle #1: I asked for help.

Miracle #2: I learned from my fourth roommate at the hospital, who was a drug addict, about a place then called SPARC or Saint Peter's Alcohol Rehabilitation Center. When Dusty called and wanted to get back together I told him that I was too sick to even consider reconciliation. I told him about SPARC where he could get help.

Miracle #3: Dusty went to SPARC.

Miracle #4: Dusty told me that there was a Twelve Step program for me where I could get help. This was where I learned three important things:

#1. I didn't cause it.

#2. I could not control it and

#3. I couldn't cure it.

After having my fist tightly around the disease for 13 years, I was able to let go of my obsession to fix Dusty and began focusing on myself.

Miracle #5: Dusty, a faithful member of AA never picked up a drink again from the day he entered SPARC. **Dusty passed in 2000 with 25 years of sobriety.** His disease gifted me a Fellowship that gave me a spiritually directed life, restored my faith in God and blessed me with an attitude of gratitude. My Dad also died sober.

Twelve Step recovery is very gentle, however, that does not make it easy. I learned to be accountable for my own actions instead of always blaming the alcoholic or others for my shortcomings. I learned to hate the disease and not the alcoholic. I realized that my perfectionism and need to control and feel responsible for everything was not helpful and annoying. I learned that the words "you are always or you are never" was the disease speaking. I learned how and when to respond and how to stop reacting with useless justification to prove that I was right and he was wrong. I came to believe that when alcoholics say I am never going

to drink again that they meant it. I understood that without a Higher Power sustained recovery is highly unlikely. As part of my recovery I attended open AA meetings where I heard the raw reality of what it is like to be a person who is alcoholic.

Throughout the Twelve Steps, God is mentioned. It is clear that it is a God of our understanding. Frustrated that I could not connect spiritually with this God of my understanding it was suggested that I find a place to act as if I knew God and prayed. It does not have to be prayer perfect they said. Just talk. So, I did. I acted as if I was talking to a Power greater than me and He liked me. I learned by practice and reading that my Higher Power was God and He actually loved me and would be the light in my soul. I learned to have a conscious contact with this God in all my affairs. I joined a church. I no longer believed in coincidences. My eyes are open wide to His miracles every day. For example: the days when I ask God to change my negative attitude into a positive one....and it happens. Or, I am overwhelmed and words come into my head, such as 5 minutes at a time, one day at a time, or I am asked the question **“is there anything you can do about it now, if not let it go until you can.”** Or I may be guided with a message do something nice for someone else or pick up the phone and “reason things out with another member.”

In recovery, I have been restored to sanity from the days of anorexia, self-loathing and Godless narcissism.

Trust me, I am aware that I am still a work in progress. I practice the Twelve Step principles every day and for 45 years I still attend meetings to sustain my recovery and to carry the message to others. I thank God for all the gifts given to me through His Grace. Today I know and understand the importance of putting my physical, mental and spiritual health first. For if I don't, I will have nothing to give to others.

I believe that in this complicated world of temptations and demands that my conscious contact with God provides me with comfort and courage. His loving Grace has helped me to understand that He expects me to do my best every day, however, someday my best will meet our expectations and other days it will disappoint both of us, but as long as it was my best it is good enough for the God of my understanding. Because, His light is in my soul I can respond to life on life's terms with reasonable expectations. As a result, my life is full, happy and Blessed.

However, I am reminded in Ephesians Chapter 2: versus 8 thru 9. ***“For by Grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”***

As you have patiently listened to me, you may feel that this is not your concern, not our concern as a congregation or that it is a hopeless situation and there is nothing we can do. **We may feel powerless to help, but we are not.**

1 John Chapter 3: verses 17-18

“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

So, what can we do together to bring hope and help to the individuals and families in our community? -Join us in STAHL... Bring your understanding of the needs that you see in our community and share your ideas how our church can make a difference.

The best way to offer help is to hand Twelve Step meeting lists, and a brochure from addiction rehabilitation or recovery facilities to the person that is in trouble with alcohol or other drugs. You can say “I think that you have a problem with alcohol or drugs and here is where you and your family can get help.” No matter what he or she says or does (cry, screams, curses) understand this is not your friend or neighbor talking it is the disease.

Alcoholics Anonymous, and for families Al-Anon Family groups both focus on alcoholism. Narcotics Anonymous and for families Nar-Anon focus on narcotics. These are free resources that are readily available within our community and some meet weekly at this church. Visitors are welcomed at meetings listed as “Open.” Conifer Park addiction treatment center and St Peter’s Addiction Recovery Centers are within 10 miles of our church. Many other options are available when an online search is made.

We know the disease is hereditary, that it progresses and without help the alcoholic can end up in jail, die or go insane. We know that the family can be as sick or sicker than the alcoholic or an addict. **Breaking down the barriers and discrimination created by stigma, will open the door for people to get help!**

Remember too, and maybe most importantly, the wife and children. Make a point to provide her with Twelve Step meeting lists for families and family recovery literature. Recovery in the family is said to make a difference in the alcoholic’s chances to seek and maintain sobriety.

In closing, STAHL’s next step, with your support, is to create an information and resource center within our church. Here you will find Twelve Step meeting lists and literature.

Conversely, the resource center will include brochures of local addiction treatment and recovery facilities. We will add to the library books on alcoholism and other addictions to borrow or in some cases to purchase. In addition, a network of people will be available to talk and support anyone who reaches out for help. That person's anonymity will always be protected.

This resource center will enable you to share lifesaving information to alcoholics, addicts and their families.

God Bless you and please pray for the still suffering alcoholic people, addicts and their families. Let us be thankful for the 22 million living in a life of recovery. I am confident that together we can create a community of support for addiction recovery that will make a difference.

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer.

***God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can and
the wisdom to know the difference. Amen***

***"The solution is not going to come from law enforcement,
it's not going to come from incarceration, or stricter laws...
The church has the answers, and the programs that are working are spiritually-based.
As United Methodists if we pull together the strength of our connection,
every church can do something."***

- Pastor Angy Trimmer - Craft Memorial United Methodist Church, Columbia, TN

About Phyllis A. Mullaney – Chairperson STAHL (Stigma Takes Away Hope and Help):

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Special Note:

All members of the JUMC Administrative Council are invited to attend any STAHL Meeting