

Spirituality and recovery are intertwined

by Rev. Tom Martin & Rev. Brian Julian-McCleary, Substance Abuse Network Members

The cruise ship left the Miami port Feb. 3 with 3,500 souls on board. Among them were 25 Lutheran pastors, many of them ELCA ministers headed for the

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Bahamas. What they all shared together was their recovery from addiction to alcohol and mood altering drugs. Two of them were from the Northeastern Iowa Synod’s Substance Abuse Network (each paid their own way).

This retreat, called “Serenity on the Sea,” gave an opportunity for these folks and their spouses to make new friends in the recovery community. There was also the benefit of disconnecting from the usual routines. Each morning on the ship they met together to discuss the book by Richard Rohr, *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*.

Spirituality and recovery are intertwined. We are not accustomed to thinking this way. Faith and addiction can work together, as the theology of the cross reminds us. The journey of recovery mirrors the Christian call to transformation, humility, and dependence on God.

The simple truth: we all need healing (from the God “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases” Ps. 103). Addiction does not discriminate (pastors are not immune), the Twelve Steps and treatment centers offer pathways not just for addicts but for anyone seeking spiritual growth (hence the role of the church, not to punish but to heal). True transformation happens when we surrender to the power of grace and move beyond our illusions of control. In other words, it’s not about us, it’s about Jesus, who gets us.

The ship returned to Miami after four nights and much “Serenity on the Sea”. This trip was sponsored by the Fellowship of Recovering Lutheran Clergy (www.frlc.org.com), an organization formed in 1990. All clergy or rostered members in any type of 12-Step recovery are welcome to join the weekly meetings during which we discuss our experiences of being in recovery while also serving as pastors (meets every Thursday at Noon CT). These are closed,



private, anonymous conference calls. If interested, contact Rev. Melanie Martin-Dent, mmartindent@yahoo.com, for the Zoom link. Anonymity is strictly protected. Altogether there are about 200 clergy that make up the FRLC from all Lutheran stripes.

Give input on ELCA draft social message

FEEDBACK IS DUE JUNE 30, 2025

Lay and rostered members of the ELCA are invited to submit input on a draft of the new “Social Message on Child Protection,” which was released in March. The draft social message, which is in response to a request from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, addresses the church’s calling to protect and nurture children and youth, both within the church and within society more broadly.

The public comment period will be open through June 30, 2025, for people to share their comments and suggestions. To learn more, read the draft and complete an online survey, visit elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/current-social-writing-projects/child-protection.

