



Shalem Digest

Mental Health Network

Topics of Interest to friends of Shalem Mental Health Network
(formerly named Salem Christian Mental Health Association)

The Significance Of Belonging

The Expert Myth

When it comes to healing pain, many of us turn to experts. Experts repair broken bones, prescribe migraine medication and remove damaging tumors. We are happy to leave physical healing in their capable hands. Outside of medicine, we have christened other experts: personal trainers, massage therapists and accountants are all regulated professionals. We love the assurance their expertise gives us, and we expect their touch will fix our immediate problems.

In my profession, I am one such "expert." I've trained and worked as a family therapist for a decade, and I've worked with many individuals, couples and families as they've struggled through painful situations. They look to me to offer fixes to their pain, be it a situation causing distress or a heavy mood they can't lift. While I love my work and see hope, change and healing every day, I am keenly aware of the limitations of my service. I care about individuals in my role but cannot offer everything needed for a person's complete recovery.

For many, recovery and healing are found in community. Our sense of belonging, attachment and connection can bring about a sense of value and peace.

Causes Of Pain

Crisis and loss—of relationship, job, connection—create pain. A crisis is an event or situation that destabilizes

someone and cannot be easily solved by a person's existing coping tools.

In those periods of crisis, we need support to stabilize ourselves, and a powerful source of such stability is not just found in a counselling office, or even a pastor's study, but rather in community. We need belonging. We need connection. As a tree's roots keep it grounded during a raging storm, connection gives us strength and resiliency in the midst of crisis or grief.

Ideally, community is a setting where relationships and connections flourish. It is our neighborhoods, our families, our network(s) of friends, our clubs, schools, workplaces and churches. Community is where we expect to be

expected and are welcomed warmly by known faces. It is the place where we are known to others, and where we share our stories, hopes and dreams.

Absence of community, whether it be through loss of job, divorce, death, estrangement or relocation, causes pain; we lose our sense of belonging. Not only do these transitions come at the cost of our immediate attachments with our co-workers, spouses, neighbours or

friends - they may also drag us into a sense of detachment from others in our wider community. We may feel alienated and isolated,

like we no longer fit. Healing often means rebuilding this sense of connection, finding a way to belong again. In

continued on page 2

We all want to belong; it's an innate part of our makeup.



Director's Corner

Mark Vander Vennen, MA, M.Ed,
R.S.W.

Clergy Care Coming to Shalem



Dear Friends,

Who cares for pastors? Who shepherds the shepherds?

I view pastors as “frontline workers”. Like medical doctors, pastors often serve as the first point of contact for people in crisis or dealing with significant emotional distress. Most pastors, like most frontline workers and other caregivers, are inclined to look after others’ needs before their own. Yet effective frontline work requires high levels of self-care and support to stay fresh and responsive.

Most pastors do remarkably well at this intensive and demanding work. But many also pay a high, hidden personal cost—a cost that is rising.

Recently the Centre for Clergy Care at the University of Toronto undertook an extensive survey of the well-being of pastors—and the results are troubling. The survey found that the number of pastors diagnosed with clinical depression is double the national average (for more, see www.caringforclergy.ca). As a group, pastors are leading the way in a disturbing trend: the World Health Organization predicts that by 2020 depression will be second only to heart disease as the leading cause of disability and death.

For some time the Shalem Board has been searching for a way to help meet the unique mental health needs of pastors and their families. Eventually, the promotion of Shalem's Congre-

continued on page 4

Significance Of Belonging

continued from page 1

this way, by providing the setting for us to feel loved, needed and wanted, community itself can be an expert in healing. It can become a powerful foundation for an individual's journey to recovery.

A newly separated man, living days during the week without his children or spouse, needs to contend not only with the heartache of loss but also his new identity as a single adult. He no longer fits in with his two-parent family friends. He may not be invited to the same social events or may feel he sticks out at church. A significant part of his healing may involve finding meaningful connection with a community, where he does feel belonging once again.

Community Offers Belonging

We all want to belong; it's an innate part of our makeup. From birth we seek key figures to value us and tell us that we fit. Parents are the first to fill that role, telling us that we are a loved part of their family. Then in our teens our friends begin to take their place, at least in part. Research into attachment has shown that the absence of this sense of

belonging and connection has a devastating effect on an individual. Not only our socialization, but the fabric of our physical and mental development depends on this attachment.

But a loss of that belonging in childhood can be rebuilt: it is possible to build new connection as youth and adults. In this way, communities can be the instruments of healing. Experiencing healthy attachment and connection with members of our community who extend to us a sense of belonging, value and acceptance, can bring about a new sense of health.

God created us to live in community. His intended shape for our lives included being born, in both a literal and a figurative sense, into relationship and nurturing. He chose our first community to be family. And he himself chose to participate in that design by His incarnation into flesh, revealing more of His personhood to us in human form, through friendship and community. The record of His story, our New Testament, is told through the eyes of His first century friends. It was in the context of love and belonging with his close community that He revealed His lavish love for us.

Healthy communities model that suffering and pain are not signs of weakness and sin, but rather are a valuable, predictable part of our journey.

Are we a safe place to land for someone feeling isolated and alone? If not, we have an opportunity for both introspection and action. How can you help to transform your community, family, neighborhood or church into a place where someone can belong?

- Consider approaching someone in your church or neighborhood this month you've never approached, someone whose life circumstances may be different than your own. Consider inviting them to an upcoming event.
- If you want more community in your life, consider joining a community organization in line with your interests. Similar interests make relationship-building easier. You could also consider volunteering with an organization you have interests in—the arts, the elderly, historical societies, conservation, children, or sports. Volunteer websites in most areas of Ontario list groups with various interest needing help. Volunteering offers a wonderful way to be around other people, making relationship-building less threatening.

What Do Churches Need To Do To Offer This Sense Of Belonging?

Jean Vanier has spoken eloquently to this issue over the years. In his book *From Brokenness to Community* he discusses the need for small and larger communities to shift away from isolation by developing an acceptance of brokenness. Being broken is not wrong. Living with pain is not a sin. Brokenness does not denote failure, ambivalence or weakness. Living through situations of crisis, grief or hurt is part of the human experience; it was part of Christ's experience. It is not 'me' and 'them'. It is me, and me at some point soon.

Healthy communities value difference. You don't need to look or act the same to fit. You are welcomed regardless of differences in nationality, bank account balance or orientation. Healthy communities build communication into their framework: opportunities to be together and talk, to bridge differences, making it better able to allow for belonging. It becomes okay to talk about these issues, okay to break the silence.

Healthy communities model that suffering and pain are not signs of weakness and sin, but rather are a valuable, predictable part of our journey. You are welcome with your job loss, your mental illness, your divorce, etc., because you are one of us, and we all suffer. Suffering together makes pain bearable.

Who Needs Community?

Christians have been mandated to seek out the oppressed and marginalized and love them. In our communities today, then, who is in need of belonging? Some groups of individuals are visible in their need: the homeless, the poor, the elderly. We see their need and make efforts to respond. And yet some forms of need are not as visible.

Single parents in schools filled with two-parent families often experience significant pain at the culture of normalcy oth-

In an informal online survey conducted in September, we asked what people most appreciate about their community. 34 respondents said:

91%	a sense of belonging
74%	company while having fun
70%	emotional support
67%	spiritual support
59%	a place to give
58%	a source of accountability
38%	people to learn with
23%	working on projects together
9%	financial support

Thanks you to all who contributed. Visit our website to contribute to future *Digest* surveys: www.shalemnetwork.org.

ers take for granted. Men and women struggling with mental illness struggle with significant isolation, feeling stigmatized and judged, as if their struggles are a sign of weakness. Other men and women in our communities may feel that their sexual orientation is not welcome in their community. Rather than risk rejection, people in such circumstances may choose silence, and thereby never experience a sense of belonging.

Whose job is it to change? Sadly, in some communities, the onus falls on the individual to comply to group norms. However, Jesus does not call us to love the lovable, He calls us to love. He calls us to love past difference, to love past discomfort.

Reaching Out

In my years counselling, I have seen a vast number of presenting issues, but my interventions are often surprisingly similar. More often than not, after some progress has been made, my role includes shifting a person's attention to their re-entry into community. I am one caring person pointing a client to a wider body of caring that may become the vehicle to ongoing emotional and spiritual health.

This sense of belonging is critical. God

has built us to seek it and live in it. Our community on earth is a reflection of our spiritual belonging, and we offer a divine reflection of God's connection to us, so it is no wonder community is so necessary for life. Godspeed as you reach out.

Jennifer Bowen, MDiv, RMFT, is the Clinical Director at Shalem Mental Health Network



For more reading, check out:

90% of Helping Is Just Showing Up, James R. Kok, Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2007

From Brokenness to Community, Jean Vanier, Paulist Press, 1992.

Community and Growth, Jean Vanier, Paulist Press, 1979

Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children, Dan Hughes, Rowan and Littlefield, 2006 (2nd ed.)

Michelle DeBoer, BA, Grad. Dipl., has returned from maternity leave and is accepting new clients at our Hamilton Clinic.

Michelle is an Art Therapist. While this is termed Art Therapy, no previous art experience or skill is required by participants. Michelle welcomes clients of all ages who are interested in an alternative to traditional talk therapy for the facilitation of self-growth and healing. She has previously worked with adults recovering from traumatic injury and hospitalization, grief, as well as children and families with issues of addiction, divorce and separation, and children with behavioural difficulties at home and school.

Michelle can be contacted at michelled@shalemnetwork.org

To book an appointment with Michelle call: 905 528-0353



Director's Corner

continued from page 2

gational Assistance Plan (CAP) brought us into contact with Rev. Craig Burton, District Superintendent of the Eastern Ontario Region of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Desiring collaboration, Craig eagerly put us in touch with a three-year old program called Emerge Ministries Canada, a program which delivers counselling and mental health services to pastors and their families across denominations. Our joint discussions resulted in a proposal from Emerge that Shalem assume or take over the Emerge Ministry, with the ongoing

support of Emerge program therapists and expertise. The Shalem Board has recently approved that proposal. Look for a new Clergy Care program at Shalem, designed specifically to address the distinctive needs of pastors and their family members, coming soon!

We are thrilled to be able to offer this new service, which will be made available across Ontario. A first step is the upcoming workshop by Dr. Marta Durski, "Addicted to Love", designed in part to help equip pastors in their pastoral care (see article below).

It is your support for Shalem that is making this possible. Thank you for your generous care! Your support is making a difference in people's lives. And in the spirit of Jennifer Bowen's article in this *Digest* about healing communities, reach out to your pastor, just as he or she reaches out to you. After all, who cares for the caregivers, and who stands on the front line for the frontline workers?

Yours in Christ,



Addicted To Love: Exploring Sex, Internet And Relationship Dependency

Can we really be addicted to love? For an emerging group of us, the answer is a resounding "yes".

For over a decade, Marta Durski has spent much time in the greater Toronto area and internationally researching, writing, teaching and counselling in the areas of sex, love and internet addictions.

Unlike substance dependency, these 'process' compulsions are ones that many of us can relate to. We all know how intoxicating a new romance feels, how

powerful sex can be, how bonded we can become to a partner and how easily we can be drawn into all the offerings of the virtual world. When taken to extremes, a person can become so preoccupied with sex, romance and relationships that serious life consequences can result. The internet acts like an accelerant, quickly turning desire into dependency. Once this happens, the person stuck in the addiction, as well as the whole family system, experience jarring emotional, relational, physical and financial effects. The devastation often feels even worse since shame and fear are particularly strong impediments to healing

and recovery from these compulsions.

Marta will be speaking about these fascinating and increasingly critical concerns on Wednesday, November 25, 2009, sponsored by Shalem. We invite mental health workers, clergy and community leaders to join us in learning not only about sex, love and internet addictions,

but how to help those caught in their grasp.

**Learn more on Wednesday
November 25, 2009**

To register, call 905 528-0353 or
866 347-0041 or visit
www.shalemnetwork.org for
more details

Marta has an extensive therapeutic background in systemic and collaborative approaches and is one of the few sex addic-

tion specialists in Ontario. After obtaining a Doctorate in Marriage and Family Therapy, her commitment to excellence continues in the form of consultations and published articles. In addition, she is an adjunct professor of graduate degree programs in Marriage and Family Therapy at universities in Canada, the USA and Peru. She is a Clinical Member of both the Ontario and American Associations of Marriage and Family Therapy.



Mark **February 22, 2010** A Day with Dan Hughes on Building the Bonds of Attachment in Traumatized Children

Watch our website for more details!

Shalem is committed to best practices in mental health and is a member of Family Service Ontario. All services are offered in strictest confidence.

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