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How is the opioid epidemic affecting you, your family, and your neighborhood? :

I lived in downtown Syracuse, NY for 8 years (4 blocks from city hall). All my neighbors had drug, prostitution, mental illness, etc. problems. Many in the church where I was a member were recovering from those former lifestyles. I live in Canfield now and I am a high school coach. I know teens in Canfield with serious issues. In other words, no community is exempt from problems. I am also a chaplain at the Mahoning County jail. I spend an average of 4 to 6 hours there every week talking to inmates, mostly those who are there for causes related to drugs or alcohol.

Personally, I have had many people offer drugs or alcohol to me and God has given me the victory not to need to give in. Some people may think you have to be in a gutter to help someone out. But that is not true. Only people with the truth (with the awareness of victory) can help others. Inmates in jail know what their cell mates are going through, but they usually cannot help, because they have not experienced victory themselves. My point? Just knowing how someone feels is not a solution to people's problems. If you make an F on a math test who are you going to go to for help? Another student who made an F, because he/she knows how you feel, or would you go to a student who knew how to make an A on the test?

What do you see as causes of the epidemic in your community and in Ohio? :

There is one main cause and there are many inferior causes. The inferior causes include hopelessness to life's struggles, emotional pain, not having any worth or purpose for living, etc. Inferior causes include influences from society (TV, music, videos, behavior of friends, story lines from around the world, beliefs taught in schools, etc.). Regarding pain, people who never get headaches never crave headache medicine; they don't have a headache. When people have no pain, they have no desire for any type of medication.

Let's be honest, almost everyone uses some form of medication. Some people overeat. Some people oversleep. Some people watch TV. etc. The problem is not which type of medication. The problem is the pain.

There is only one way for people to have meaning and purpose for living. There is only one way for people to have rest, to have peace. There is only one way for people to have genuine love for others. When people experience this major change, they experience resolution to their pain and their desire for medication diminishes greatly.

What steps might we take as a state to combat the opioid epidemic? :

1. Be honest. Look at the results from drug rehab places. What percentage of the graduates are completely free from drugs and never relapse? If the answer is terribly low why does government keep dumping more money into efforts that don't work?

2. Be honest. Take notice of communities that use to be drug infested and now they are radically different - loving, caring, law-abiding, etc. Consider Clay County, Kentucky where almost half of the households were growing pot and law-abiding government leaders were killed. Overdoses for teenagers were so common that adults feared they would lose the entire next generation. A government leader named Karen Engle was put in charge of cleaning up Clay County. When major changes took place in 2004 she admitted the truth that the problem was bigger than government could handle. Elsewhere and at different times, many areas of the United States experienced a severe drop in crime, especially around 1940 and again around 1800. The entire country of Wales had virtually no crime when the national change took place in 1905. My eyes have personally seen dramatic changes in the lives of people where they resolved deep seated issues in their lives and their mental issues or addictions or whatever ended immediately. Their pain was over.

Answer: There really isn't anything the government can do to end the opioid epidemic. But the government can do a lot to quit propagating it.

Ending the opioid epidemic is the responsibility of the church. Unfortunately, the church has dropped the ball. We pray that will change.

What might we do as individuals and a community to reduce opioid abuse?:

There are many little things. But the biggest things include

1. Personal humility and repentance (we all have issues)
 2. Prayer for God's intervention
 3. Crying out to God for the church to be the church
 4. Helping people one at a time and send them out to help others
 5. Using great resources that lead people to discover truth and to resolve pain and other issues.
- When the demand for drugs diminishes the supply will have no business.

Anything else you'd like to share?:

Only truth will set people free.

Please understand the tone of my last comment as confidence and optimism - not arrogance. Give me anyone who is truly desperate to be set free, especially someone "who has tried everything." Watch what happens. It has nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with the truths of the Lord. I pray that all the people of our land experience real victory, love, hope, peace, and joy.