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2. A church-based counseling ministry is able to reveal and implement the power of God in the change process — Ephesians 3:14-21

Accessing the Spirit's power to change may at times elude the struggling Christian. Having mature and caring group leaders to guide and access God's available power is essential. Small group leaders, pastors, ministers, deacons, counselor- trained disciples and elders know each other better than the office bound counselor. We know the personal back-stories and the unique challenges of being a disciple. We know the direction of the church, the sermons taught, the specific problems a church may face and the history of the struggling disciple. Rather than a "designated expert" and a "needy client," the body of Christ works in unique and Christ centered ways. Friendships are fluid and often flourish in peer relationships. The richness of the church setting rises above the office-bound counselor in effectiveness and opportunity to give glory to God.

3. A church-based counseling program prepares God's people for works of service — Ephesians 4: 11-16

Each part doing its work - every member in your church can be working and living to their full potential! The struggling Christian has the ability and opportunity to be completely open about the personal workings of God's Spirit, the challenges of outreach, the life of worship, the significance of Scripture and the social dynamics of their participation in the church. The disciple is best understood in the church setting. Christians who experience freedom from addictive behavior or other nagging sins serve in powerful ways – many for the first time in years. Also, the "Big Questions" can be addressed. What is my purpose? How do I identify myself? What values do I place on my career, relationships or my walk with God? The church is a faithful, unique, safe and confidential environment to answer these, and other essential questions.

Note: Some have severe clinical issues with depression, anxiety and other mental health problems that may not be best addressed in the church setting and should be referred out to private counseling. Even then, the Scriptures and church life should be an integral part of any recovery journey for the Christian.

**See http://www.ccef.org/counseling/choosing-a-christian-counselor for helpful information on choosing a Christian counselor.*

This article was written by Dr. Timothy Sumerlin. Tim is the director of In Motion Counseling, a ministry that delivers inspiration and direction to bring church-based counseling to the ICOC family of churches. Contact Tim at timothysumerlin@gmail.com or go to www.inmotioncounseling.org for more information.

To access professional, licensed counselors who are members of the International Churches of Christ and commended by their church leaders, please see DTCounselorConnect.com

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October 17-31, 2015

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Why Counseling is an Integral Part of the Lord's Church

Dr. Timothy Sumerlin, Denver, CO



There has been a trend in the past decade in the International Churches of Christ away from mentoring and counseling in the church, toward private counseling – that is, disciples going outside the church for many "ordinary" counseling needs.

This is prevalent in some of the more persistent problems such as addiction to pornography, depression and anxiety, deep-rooted bitterness, childhood abuse issues and a variety of marriage or other relationship issues.

While private counseling may be both appropriate and warranted, it has become, at times, both ineffective and expensive. Ephesians 3-4 make it abundantly clear that we are to counsel one another in the church and that we have powerful and effective resources (small groups, house churches, counselor-trained disciples) to do so. Consider the following:

1. A church-based counseling ministry is able to make plain the gospel message — Ephesians 3:7-12

Some disciples may not need much help in understanding God's ongoing grace, the gospel message in their lives. Many though, because of a history of abuse, addictive behavior, mental health challenges or the consequences of sin, need additional help in understanding and applying the gospel message in their lives. Certainly, those who are studying the Bible or being restored to the Lord need this help and the church is the appropriate place for counsel. As leaders, we are to make the gospel plain, understandable and relevant.

Christians are not defined as "problems" or "projects" but are identified within the church as people with gifts and specific talents. We are all given a greater role to play in the church that exceeds any problem we may have. Hearts can to be revealed, counseled and attended to in the church setting!

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