

[00:00:00] **Michelle Day:** [00:01:00] Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to The Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence's webinar series. Today's session is scheduled to run from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. My name is Michelle Day and I am your moderator for the session, along with Janice Fulkerson and Erica Walker. A couple of brief housekeeping items and then we'll begin.

You entered today's session on mute and your video was off and will remain so for the entirety of the webinar. Your chat feature is located at the bottom right of your screen. Use the dropdown feature to communicate with either the panelists only or panelists and attendees. Please direct all questions regarding the webinar content to the Q and A section.

Be advised that this meeting is being recorded and will be available to you on our website once it has been transcribed. You can access our website at www.FletcherGroup.org. Also, at the conclusion of today's session, [00:02:00] there will be a short survey regarding the webinar content. Your participation in that survey is greatly appreciated and will only take a few moments to complete.

Today's presenter is Fletcher Group's own Director of Faith-Based Initiatives, Dr. Matt Johnson. Matt comes to The Fletcher Group after 15 years serving as a United Methodist pastor. An advocate for marginalized people, an innovator, and entrepreneur by nature, he delights in starting new things and finding creative ways to connect churches and other faith-based entities with the communities they serve.

With over 25 years of experience as a public speaker, Matt enjoys and excels at networking, coaching, teaching, and motivating faith-based individuals, and organizations intent on helping those in recovery. Matt began engaging his Morgantown, West Virginia Congregation in Recovery work in 2018. And in 2020 founded the Abundant Life Recovery Housing Network, a 30-bed faith-based recovery residence network serving in north central [00:03:00] West Virginia.

Matt holds a Doctorate of Ministry and Leadership from Wesley Theological Seminary, as well as degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary and Messiah College. Matt, the floor is yours.

[00:03:14] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Welcome to our webinar this afternoon. It's great to have you joining us from wherever you are joining us from. We'd love to have you tell us in the chat where you're coming from and who you are.

Uh, as the introduction said, my name is Matt Johnson and I have been the Director of Faith-Based Initiatives, uh, for The Fletcher Group since July. And so, uh, finding my way and continuing to help folks across the country think about faith, faith-based engagement has been an absolute joy. I live in Morgantown, West Virginia.

It's wild and wonderful, but I've spent time in Kentucky and in Pennsylvania and uh, and currently working with, uh, organizations across the country in some faith-based work. But today we want to begin to [00:04:00] talk about what it looks like for us to develop faith-based partnerships for recovery residences that benefit both the residents and also, uh, the faith-based community at large.

I really believe that the opportunity to create partnerships that are meaningful can be a really significant thing that we're doing in recovery work. Uh, we open with this quote from, uh, Father Richard Rohr, and if you've never read Father Rohr, uh, he's a Catholic priest who runs the Center for Action, Contemplation and Action in, uh, in New Mexico.

And he wrote a book called *Breathing Under Water*, which is a, a faith-based, um, look at the 12 steps. And he writes that this is one of those areas where the work of the 12 steps overlaps with the work of Faith. He says that these principles kind of hold those two things steady. We suffer to get well, we surrender to win.

We die to live. We give it away to keep it. [00:05:00] And I just think that summary of what recovery looks like and how faith works is a powerful and beautiful thing. And so as we get started this afternoon, I wanted you to, to see those words, uh, from Father Richard. Uh, as you know, faith and spirituality play a crucial part in the work of recovery in many communities.

Many folks who are in long term recovery and committed to long term recovery, uh, share that their faith and spirituality, their connection to a higher power or to a god of their understanding has been a crucial part of their recovery. Uh, this study that you see on the screen that was done by Lyons, Deans, and Kelly, uh, showed that 82% of people who had a spiritual awakening during treatment were still abstinent at one year, as compared to 55% of people who did not report a

similar awakening. And those are pretty significant numbers when we think about what it looks like [00:06:00] and, and the role that, that faith and

spirituality can play in recovery. Uh, I, I, I'm a United Methodist pastor. I, I've been a United Methodist all my life and, uh, I often think about the founder of American Methodism, a guy named John Wesley.

Uh, when Wesley had an experience where he, um, kind of had this spiritual awakening, uh, he said that his heart was strangely warmed. And, uh, I think that this experience of having our heart strangely warmed, of being known. Understanding kind of the relationship that we can have with God with a higher power, with faith, is such a significant thing when it comes to recovery and when it comes to recovery work.

And so, for many people, faith and spirituality has played and continues to play an important role in a recovery journey, in a recovery process. Studies show that about 73% of substance use recovery [00:07:00] programs in the United States include a spirituality-based element. Uh, and that's really embodied well in, uh, programs and fellowships like the 12 Steps, like NA or AA, or programs which emphasize a reliance on the power of God or higher power, or God of your own understanding.

And so again, the language around faith is often deeply interwoven into the work that happens in recovery. And so, the opportunity for partnerships to exist between faith-based organizations and between recovery work, I think is, is really rich if we're willing to invest in those collaborative efforts.

And if we're willing to think about ways that we can be connected together, there's a lot of, a lot of power and significance that can take place. Um, I think that rep, that faith-based organizations, uh, in our communities can be important partners in the recovery ecosystems that we develop. Now, I'm sure [00:08:00] a lot of folks on this call are, uh, recovery housing operators, and you've done the work of running Recovery House or starting a recovery house.

Maybe you've worked with The Fletcher Group as we've kind of helped you envision what it looks like to connect with your community, and to think about the partnerships that we need to put in place. Lots of times when we do that work, we think about employers and we think about, uh, criminal justice involvement and engagement.

We, we think about therapists and hospital workers and mental health, when we think about community entities, but I wonder how often we think about faith-based organizations as being critical partners in the recovery ecosystems that we are developing and building in our community. I wonder how often we

understand that the faith-based organizations that are in our communities can be and should be crucial partners in the work that we're trying to do in bringing forth, uh, the gifts of recovery in the lives of our residents.

I wonder for faith-based leaders [00:09:00] who may be joining us this afternoon that maybe, uh, you've been thinking about ways to get involved and you're not sure what that looks like. There are opportunities for partnerships to be engaged that are so beneficial and so significant. And so powerful for the recovery ecosystems that we're trying to develop.

And so what I really want to help us think about today is what some of those partnerships can look like and why this is such an important idea and why this is something we really want to invest. Uh, in many rural communities, faith-based organizations are key members of the community. They are often the center of conversation, education, community life and service.

So, I grew up in Pennsylvania. I grew up in a little town called Heineman, Pennsylvania. Uh, it's in the Appalachian Mountains in Bedford County, PA. Uh, it's kind of tucked in between mountains and a stream and, uh, my dad was a United Methodist pastor and he pastored six churches [00:10:00] that were within about a five-mile radius of this little community.

There were churches, I feel like on every single street corner, uh, in that little tiny community of less than a thousand people, there were well over a hundred churches. And so, churches really were, uh, engaged in the life of the community, and the church became, and these faith-based organizations became a crucial part of what happened.

And so, when it came to making sure that, uh, elementary school and high school students had gloves and hats and jackets. Faith-based community stepped in and did that. When I lived there, there was a devastating flood, a, a flood that wiped out, I think 80 of the 280 homes in the community, and the faith-based community responded.

To make sure that there were opportunities to rebuild and to work together to kind of reform that community, the faith-based communities where people gathered to talk about things that were happening that were crucial in the community. Um, things that the community were facing, ideas that were coming down the pike.[00:11:00]

The faith-based communities were the places where a lot of that conversation happened. I think that continues to be true in a lot of our rural areas, particularly in rural areas that have been impacted by the substance use epidemic and by SUD. I think those churches and those, those faith-based communities can be and should be, uh, key

focus points that allow us to grow partnerships and have an impact in the community overall. And so, as we think about community partners, as we think about collaborative partners, finding those partners in faith-based organizations can be incredibly powerful in the way that we begin to relate to our community and in the impact that we can have in the work that we do.

Faith-based, uh, communities bring significant value in relationships and service and volunteerism to community organizations. Across the country research has shown that [00:12:00] faith-based organizations contribute over \$316 billion worth of savings to the US economy. 316 billion with a B, dollars of savings to the US economy.

And so again, tapping into these organizations and creating the relationships that are mutually beneficial and engaging is such an important part of what we can do as we're thinking about the ways to better serve the residents that we work with. And as we're thinking about ways to be better and more fully engaged in the life of our communities.

Well, one of the reasons that I think that this partnership works so well is because faith-based organizations are often looking for a way to develop these meaningful and purposeful relationships in the community. I kind of see myself, um, in this season of my life as someone who has a, a foot in both worlds.

I, I have a [00:13:00] foot in the recovery housing space as I continue to, as I, as I work with The Fletcher Group, and as I've done work developing and starting and running recovery housing, and I still get a chance to interact with the folks who live in that house on a regular basis. Which is fantastic. It keeps me grounded and it helps me understand what's happening.

At the same time, I, I continue to serve as a, as a pastor and as a faith leader and think about things through that lens. And so, I have this, what I hope is a unique perspective that kind of sees the viewpoint of both kind of organizations. I think right now we are at a unique moment in history as faith-based organizations are looking for new ways to connect with our communities.

Um, the pandemic was really hard on faith-based organizations, just like it was hard on all of us. But the challenge to not suddenly be gathering together for, uh, worship, for conversation was really hard. [00:14:00] And it was a really hard thing. And while a lot of those faith-based organizations took their services, uh, online, suddenly now they're facing a new reality where it's not always sure that people are showing up in person.

It's not always sure how those things work. And many faith leaders are realizing that the work of engaging with our community must be more purposeful and focused. It can't just happen. It happens because of intentional engagement. And so, I think there are a lot of faith communities, faith based organizations that are looking for opportunities to make this partnership.

I think there's a lot of opportunities for us to really be, to invest in these relationships and see what it looks like for us to develop collaborative efforts in working in the recovery ecosystems in our communities. Faith-based organizations should be those places that respond pretty readily and pretty quickly because honestly, faith compels [00:15:00] the work.

The work that we do in in recovery should be driven and can and is compelled by the faith and the values that many organizations have. For example, in, in Islam, uh, there are five major tenets of faith and one of those major tenets calls for engagement. Uh, one of the five pillars of faith in Islam includes offering dignity and care for the poor, particularly in the areas of food, shelter, clothing, and education.

What does that sound like? That sounds like a recovery ecosystem to me. Right? It sounds like a hub where we develop these relationships with our community providing care and concern when it comes to food, shelter, clothing, and education. These are what we do as recovery housing operators. In the Jewish faith

uh, this, there's this beautiful idea. It says all are siblings. It flows from this word that means sibling or [00:16:00] brother, and it says that we are to view the marginalized community, not as outsiders and others but his siblings, um, Don Isaac Abravanel, who was a 15th century commentator, said the reasons that we give aid were to express mercy, to recognize those who are struggling as our relative and to commit to sustaining our community.

To commit to sustaining our community. When I read that, that really stopped me in my tracks. Because we have seen so many rural communities and other

communities just decimated by SUD and by the opioid epidemic. That to commit to sustain our community as part of an act of faith is a powerful thing.

It's a powerful idea, and it's one that we can deeply embrace.

In, in Christianity, we come to a deeper sense of, of empathy. [00:17:00] Uh, when we think about the passage in Matthew 25 where Jesus teaches and says, Um, when I was hungry, you gave me something to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was in prison, you visited me, wherever, whatever you did for the least of these or the struggling in our community, you did for me.

Uh, this beautiful idea that says we can serve one another. And by doing that, we are actually serving Jesus. What a powerful thing. And so as you see these kind of major religions that hold these tenets of engagement, of service, of care, of mercy, as part of the foundational beliefs of their belief system means that as people of faith, we should be and could be more deeply engaged in the work of recovery that happens in our communities.

More than that, and, [00:18:00] and in across the board, in faith-based in faith thinking and faith-based organizations, uh, the idea of hope remains so foundational and so fundamental. Hope that is not just wishing. How often I think do we confuse the idea of hope with wishing. Hope is not just wishing for a different outcome.

Hope is this deep abiding belief that God does work in the world and will continue to bring about something better, and continue to bring about the healing that we long for and look for. And so we are people of hope. Uh, faith-based organizations are places where hope is nurtured and born and cared for.

We lean into hope with this belief that faith compels us, drives us, and assists us in the work of transformation and redemption. What a powerful idea. What a powerful idea. So there are [00:19:00] good reasons why those things. Uh, there are possibilities for partnership between faith-based organizations and, and

recovery entities. Um, but there's also barriers, and I would be really interested if you're watching this today as a, as an operator, as recovery housing operator or staff person. If, if you would let us know some of the barriers that have existed in your community when connecting with faith-based organizations, share those in the chat.

Let us know what some of those barriers are. I would love to see those, uh, because I do think the barriers that we face are very real, Uh, one of the barriers is I think there is a lack of understanding about substance use disorder or recovery in many faith-based communities. Uh, there's maybe just not a, a fullness or a full understanding of what that looks like. In many faith-based communities

stigma is based around the idea that, um, substance use disorder is a moral [00:20:00] failing. And so we say, well, we don't want to be associated with people that have that kind of moral failing. And there needs to be some education and understanding around what it is and what it isn't. And that SUD really is a disorder.

It's really something that, that people look for and, um, work, work to overcome. Um, it's not something that anyone ever chooses. And to help people understand that so that we don't just see this as a moral failing or a moral, uh, a moral lapse is such an important piece because that just raises stigma and raises NIMBYism.

So we have to be aware of that and help do some education. There can be a lack of knowledge around recovery housing that operates in your community. So, uh, as was shared in the introduction, I've lived in, in Morgantown, West Virginia for, uh, almost nine years, and I have made it my business in those nine years to be deeply engaged and involved with my community.

Um, I saw myself not as [00:21:00] serving a church, but really as serving a community as a. So I worked really hard to get to know what was happening. Uh, in 2018. Uh, the church that I served decided that we were going to do some work around recovery. Uh, West Virginia had experienced, uh, a lot of, a lot of hurt and challenge around SUD and opioids.

And so, we thought we, we want to be a part of the solution to what's happening in our community. Um, government's doing it, the state's doing it. Social service agencies are doing it. The church has a role. And so we began to think about what it would look like for us to be involved in that work. Now, to be 100% honest with you, I did not anticipate being involved in that work.

I was the associate pastor. I had other things I was focusing on. I had other things that I cared about. I I wasn't going to, uh, stick around and, and do that. And, uh, the senior pastor left and on his way out the door, he said, uh, Matt,

you're in charge of our recovery [00:22:00] program now. Good. So I thought, well, I like starting new things.

I've always liked starting new things. I've always liked, uh, finding new ways to, to reach out to the community. In, in the very first work I did in church work and in ministry, I started a new church. I started a church that met in a bar. And so, I've really come full circle in my life now that I'm doing recovery work.

But I thought, okay, we're going to do this. And so we began to think about and plan, uh, what it would look like to start a Celebrate Recovery program. We opened our Celebrate Recovery program after a years worth of work and people begin to to come. And people begin to come from some local recovery houses. And I will tell you the honest truth. Up until that moment in my life, I didn't know that recovery houses existed in this community.

Lived here nine years, I just didn't know that they were here. And, uh, learning about recovery housing and learning about those places really messed up the course of my life, but in a way that I'm really grateful for. Um, [00:23:00] sometimes there's just a lack of knowledge that recovery housing exists or operates in our community.

And so making those intentional partnerships and developing those intentional relationships is so important. Sometimes there's a, a barrier when it comes to an unwillingness to get out of our silos. There's this belief that says we have to do everything, right? There's a belief that says that we hold all the knowledge, we hold all the information, we hold all the ability, and so we're going to do things our way and nobody else can do it our way.

And then they're going to do things their way and, and there's this unwillingness to collaborate or to develop meaningful partnerships. I like to think about recovery housing as being a hub that connects our residents to a variety of opportunities and, and services. We are the ones who know what's happening, and even if we don't have the solution, we can help them connect to somebody that's doing that important work in our community.

And so, thinking about ourselves not as silos, but [00:24:00] as collaborative partners in the work of recovery in our community is very, very important. Finally, there are stereotypes that exist about each other. Um, there are stereotypes that exist about faith communities. There are stereotypes that exist about people in recovery.

Lots of times those stereotypes aren't true. I'll tell you there, there are many times in my life where I've had to apologize for the hurt and harm that has been perpetuated by the churches that I served. We don't always get it right. And those of us in the faith-based community don't always get it right. But the stereotype that says people of faith are hypocritical, judgmental, uh, unwilling to deal with outsiders, that's not always true.

Sometimes there's stereotypes about people in the recovery community too, right? We know what those stereotypes are, we know what those stigmas look like. And sometimes if you're unwilling to see past the [00:25:00] stereotypes that exist or unwilling to engage with the other person. And so, I wonder what are the stereotypes that we need to be aware of that we harbor against other people?

What are the things that we need to be engaged with? Stereotypes can only be really overcome in one main way, and that's to draw close to the people that you're engaged with. Brene Brown says it's hard to hate people up close, and so to overcome those stereotypes happens through connection, through relationship, through engagement, and we begin to realize that the stereotypes we have about the other aren't always accurate.

So, what do we do? How do we begin to envision what practical steps are helpful when thinking about the partnerships that can exist between faith-based communities and recovery organizations? Uh, I think there's a couple things that we can begin to think about. One is I, I think that faith [00:26:00] communities can provide.

I think that faith communities can provide space that's often needed in recovery housing and recovery engagement. Um, listen, lots of faith-based organizations are property rich. There are buildings, there are houses, there's land that they own that may not be as utilized as regularly as it was once, or maybe just sits empty.

What would it look like? What would it look like if, uh, a faith-based organization said we have a space that we only use once a week, and we'd be willing to use some of that space on the other days. That's not, you know, the day of worship, the day of our gathering to host an RCO to host a Recovery Community Organization.

What a powerful thing that would be. What would it look like to envision the way that we use space in a meaningful way. Uh, more than that, a lot of faith-

based organizations have houses that at one point clergy lived in. Uh, I grew up, [00:27:00] like I said, in a pastor's house. I lived in a parsonage. Um, I lived in a parsonage when I was doing pastoral work.

We have a house and there's a lot of faith-based organizations that have houses that are readily available. Um, the organization that I started here in West Virginia, uh, partnered with a local church that had an empty house that we rented, and so we rented it and turned it into recovery housing. And it was such a significant thing because suddenly the relationship that existed between the, the church and the faith community and the relationships that existed between the, uh, recovery house was real.

The faith community got a rent check every month that they were thrilled about, that helped them kind of run the life of their congregation. But they also became deeply invested in the lives of the people that lived in the house. And so, they'd stop by with food, they'd engage the, the residents would say, hello.

The residents helped take care of the property. There was this mutually beneficial connection that happened there, and it was a powerful [00:28:00] thing. Lots of times, if you're looking for space, faith-based organizations may have that space, and faith-based organizations may be looking for ways to utilize that space.

There's currently a movement in many faith-based conversations to rethink the way we use property. And there's a movement to think about affordable housing and ways that our spaces can be used to become more beneficial to communities. And so, maybe one of those things you can talk about if you're looking for more space as, as a, as an operator or recovery housing entity, is to come to, uh, just to come to a faith-based organization.

It's long been known that many NA, AA, 12 step groups meet in the basement of, uh, of churches and, and synagogues and mosques. And my thing is, let's not just shut people in the basement. Let's develop some meaningful relationships. It's not just enough to host. What we're looking for is an engagement that is transformational and life changing.

One of the great needs in [00:29:00] many rural communities is transportation, and, uh, I'm sure that if you're an operator you run into that issue around transportation particularly in rural communities, people don't have, uh, access to transportation. There may not be public transportation. I think faith-based organizations can be phenomenal partners when it comes to transportation

because there may be a faith-based organization that has a bus or a van that only gets used once a week.

They might be willing to let you use it for your, for some of your work in relationship to some, to some connection. Um, more than that, a lot of, a lot of faith-based organizations have folks in their communities that are, uh, that are maybe retired or newly retired and are looking for their, some way to spend their time.

My, my parents are both retired and I think that they're busier now than they ever were because they're finding ways to volunteer and to be engaged in their communities. And I think one of the options we can say is, what would it look like for a recovery [00:30:00] entity and a, and a faith-based organization, um, to develop a transportation partnership where the, the faith-based organization would help

connect drivers, people that were looking for some connection, people that maybe were, were lonely to help people get to meetings or to work or to the doctor's office. That could be a significant benefit to the folks that we serve. And it could be a powerful way to connect in the community.

Transportation partnerships are a huge piece of what could, what could happen and, and what could be. There's lots of ways that, um, faith-based communities can be involved when it comes to sponsorship or, or mentorship or move-in costs. Um, I've seen, um, faith-based organizations that kind of sponsor a room, and so they sponsor a bedroom and in a house, which means that they paint it, they decorate it, they make sure the bedding is there, that the bed's there.

They kind of provide the funding to sponsor that room and develop a relationship with the residents that might reside there. I think that's such a [00:31:00] phenomenal idea and many faith-based organizations there are groups of folks that would do that work. Um, like I said, I was, uh, United Methodist pastor for 15 years and in our organization, we have something called the United Methodist Women and the United Methodist Women are a force of nature and if they are going to work with you, they will work with you in powerful ways.

And I know every faith-based organization has a women's group, but is an absolute force of nature. And when those people can come alongside you and become sponsors and become deeply engaged in your work, that's a powerful

thing. Mentorship is another opportunity for these relationships to grow and to develop.

Whether you're working with someone that's, uh, growing as a parent, whether you're working with someone that's growing as an employee, whether you're working with someone that wants to grow in their educational accomplishments, having a mentor that can walk alongside them, having somebody that they can call that can help answer some of those questions is a significant thing.

And so those mentor, mentoring relationships can be a possibility as we think about these partnerships. [00:32:00] And then in a lot of places, if there's not, uh, a per diem or if you're not able to collect, um, bed fees for Medicaid. There are costs that recovery housing entities, uh, face around program fees, around movement costs.

And a lot of times when people come to us, they don't have it. And you've probably experienced that in the same way that I did. It just, it wasn't there. People didn't have it. Faith-based organizations are looking for ways to give back and so to develop partnerships where you say, would you help us sponsor a resident?

Would you help a resident come in and find a place where they belong, where they fit, where they're known, where they're at home, and would you help provide them with the first month of costs? And they are faith-based organizations that will do that. Or maybe you'd say, would you come in and help provide a, a resident with

the money that they need to get a valid state ID. There may be a faith-based organization, big or small, that would take on that challenge of making sure they could help with that process. The relationships and the opportunities for connection [00:33:00] is a powerful, powerful thing that we should not and cannot take for granted.

I think faith-based organizations can be important partners around NIMBY conversations and around reducing stigma. Many folks in rural communities face NIMBY, *Not In My Backyard* issues and I really believe that if we were able to get faith-based organizations in rural communities to back and be supportive of the work that we're doing in recovery housing, that a lot of those NIMBY concerns could be addressed.

Because in many communities, when you get a faith-based organization on board, it encompasses a lot of people. And that organization has a lot of sway and ability. Maybe you write it, maybe they're willing to write an op-ed to the paper in support of the work you're doing. Maybe a pastor or a, a rabbi or a faith leader is willing to write that letter that that states that they stand [00:34:00] with you in your work.

That's a powerful thing. That is a really powerful thing in many rural communities. Uh, I, I've encouraged folks to do that and can help folks think about that, if that's something that's going to assist you in dealing with those, um, concerns around stigma reduction and NIMBYism. I think that faith-based organizations can be sponsors around educational community, uh, educational opportunities when it comes to harm reduction.

Um, there in, here in, in West Virginia, there's an organization that's run by one of my colleagues called the Ezekiel Project, and their idea is that they work to get Naloxone and Narcan into the hands of faith organizations across the the state. Uh, they reference a story from the Old Testament where Ezekiel sees a valley of dry bones come to life, and they continue to believe that life is beautiful and precious and life can come even, um, when it seems like death is [00:35:00] imminent.

And I mean, that's, that's one of the foundational beliefs of faith, that they're, that life is always possible, and life is always worth it. And so, they work to educate people, developing these relationships where, um, faith communities can become, supportive around harm reduction, developing relationships where faith communities can be supportive around Narcan distribution is a powerful, powerful thing that can be supportive and connected in our communities.

I think one of the, one of the real benefits to developing these partnerships is that faith communities should be able to help reframe the conversation that happens around recovery. Around the human dignity and sacred worth of in, of each individual. You see this, uh, quote on the screen, *Dignity is as essential to human life, as water, food, and oxygen.*

The stubborn retention of it, even in the face of extreme physical hardship can hold a man's soul in his body long past the point at which the body should have surrendered it. A belief in [00:36:00] the dignity and worth of each individual is inherent in the conversations that we have in faith-based communities.

And for us to continue to emphasize that and for us to continue to believe that and live that out is a significant, significant thing. So, as you think about the communities that you're in, as you think about the communities that where, where you kind of find yourself, maybe as a faith leader, there's opportunities for you to look for recovery housing in the community, and to begin to say, what can we offer?

What do we bring, maybe as, uh, recovery housing leader, there's opportunities for you to begin to bridge the gap that often exists between faith organizations and the recovery community. These are, uh, these are tremendous opportunities. I, I, I was thinking, uh, about a story that, uh, is told in the biblical text.

Of [00:37:00] Jesus who's out teaching and walking with people. And, uh, a large crowd gathers and, uh, Jesus teaches over what he was supposed to and he teaches through lunch and the people get hungry and there are not drive-throughs close by and they don't have any food and they begin to murmur. And one boy says, I have some fish and some bread.

And he takes the fish and the bread that he has, and Jesus blesses it and uses it to feed thousands of people. I say that, because I believe that faith-based organizations hold in our hands the resources that if we allow them to be used in meaningful and powerful ways can be a blessing to our communities.

And, I believe the recovery organizations hold in our hands, the resources that if we allow them to be blessed, can be meaningful and powerful tools to our communities. [00:38:00] Building those bridges and bridging that gap is something that's crucial to what we do. Um, and that's my job. That's what I do as the Director of Faith-based initiatives for The Fletcher

Group is I help bridge that gap. I help us develop those partnerships, and so if I can help you do that in the coming days, I would love to. You can reach out to me and contact me and we'll begin to think about the ways that we can develop more meaningful partnerships between recovery, housing, and faith based organizations.

That's me, that's my picture. Uh, and that's my email address. You can contact me, and we can be happy to talk about some of the ways that we can envision partnerships that exist in community. So, there we go. We, I think we've got some time for some, some Q and A and some questions or some, uh, thoughts and feedback.

[00:38:54] **Janice Fulkerson:** Matt, we have a lot of questions for you that have come through in the chat. Um, [00:39:00]

[00:39:00] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Great.

[00:39:00] **Janice Fulkerson:** One, uh, uh, uh, person in the chat, um, I believe from rural Oregon says a barrier that they've experienced is that as a longstanding faith-based agency, they don't always have the financial advantages that local mental health providers might have. When it comes to advantages,

[00:39:18] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Absolutely.

[00:39:18] **Janice Fulkerson:** and access. Can you speak to that?

[00:39:20] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Yeah, I think that that's a, that that can be a real barrier that that exists in those places. And so one of the things that we think about is the ways that those faith-based agencies and faith-based organizations can continue to develop meaningful partnerships with a variety of community members.

I think as we embed ourselves in communities, there becomes opportunity for, um, those partnerships to grow and those partnerships to, to thrive. I also think that in a lot of places there are faith-based organizations that offer grants and funding to other faith-based organizations. And so, if we look at some of some of these foundations, um, you know, maybe it's denominational, maybe it's the National Christian [00:40:00] Foundation, there's opportunities for us to kind of tap into some other funding streams and some other funding.

That may be a possibility. And so that'd be one of those things I can think of. How do we continue to develop meaningful relationships and partnerships that invite people to be involved in our work in big and in small ways?

[00:40:18] **Janice Fulkerson:** Yep. Thank you, Matt. Um, a follow up question to that is that initial outreach and the fear of the unknown. Um, if there, if there's a community where there's some fear of the unknown and stigma, you know, if there's initial outreach that maybe isn't responded to, how do you continue to try?

[00:40:39] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Yeah, that's a great question. And again, that's those places where I often find myself, um, apologizing for sometimes the harm that's done by faith-based people.

Unfortunately. Uh, I think as you continue to look for, um, people that may share the same passion and the [00:41:00] same vision that you have for the work that that happens, you'll find the right people. It's not always easy. It does require some willingness to put ourselves out there. It does require us to have some willingness to, to, um, have some conversations that may be uncomfortable.

But I think there's ways that we can frame the work that we do in ways that, uh, faith-based organizations can understand and, uh, and can really latch onto. And again, that's where I would, you know, love just to have a phone call and we can work together to talk about what those specific things are. What are the, the things that you want to highlight in your program, and how do we help people understand the significant impact that, that that's having in communities and invite them to be part of that process. So that, that would be something that I would say right off the.

[00:41:47] **Janice Fulkerson:** Thank you, Matt. I'm scrolling through the questions. A lot of them really are about that first step, um mm-hmm. . So if there's other observations or examples that you want to share, now would be a good time. I

[00:41:59] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** I [00:42:00] think that it, you know, setting up a meeting, uh, setting up a conversation with, uh, local faith leaders is, is a really important thing. Now, having one of those little brochure, a little brochure about your work and just inviting someone to say, can you come have coffee with me or can I come meet you for 30 minutes? And just kind of give you an overview of what we do so that there may be some opportunities for us to, to connect and there may be some opportunities for us to chat.

I think understanding that there are, um, that there things that are beneficial to, to both organizations. I, when I started recovery housing, I believe, and I continue to believe that there are benefits, um, to a recovery house if they have a faith-based partner. But I think there are benefits to a faith-based agency if they're partnered with a recovery house.

Uh, I don't see this as a one-way relationship. I see this as, uh, a, both, kind of, both a relationship that benefits, uh, parties and both organizations, in, in

significant ways, in the ways that it reduces [00:43:00] stigma, in the ways that it creates connections, in the ways that it increases purpose and meaning, in the ways that it allows us to, to find, um, other ways to be engaged and involved in our community.

And so really just being willing to, to take that step. Um, maybe you ask somebody and say, who do you know? Or maybe you know, someone that is engaged with the local faith entity, a local faith-based organization, say, would you help introduce me to your faith leaders? Would you help introduce me to your community missions team?

Would you help introduce me to the team of, of women that are doing the significant works? There's, there's, there's opportunities to kind of take those steps and just to share about the work that you're doing. Um, you know most faith leaders I know don't bite. Um, and if we do, our bite's not that bad. So at least you can kind of take that step and see who might be willing to be engaged with the work that you're doing.

[00:43:54] **Janice Fulkerson:** That's, oh go ahead, Ernie, please.

[00:43:56] **Dr. Ernie Fletcher:** I just wanted to add a little experience here. One, another [00:44:00] approach is to reach out. A lot of communities have ministerial associations. Matt, I don't know if you've. I know you participated in those. Uh, we've, I've done that in a couple of communities now, is to go there, meet the leaders of the ministerial association, talk to them, and sometimes they'll allow you to give a very brief presentation of, of your work and your willingness to collaborate with churches. And that might be a way of, of beginning to interface with the faith-based community

[00:44:32] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Yeah, absolutely. Those kind of, whether ministerial organizations or, or just, I mean, this question, you know, you, you just, you go knock on the door, you go say hello and introduce yourself. You set up a time. Right. It's, it's, uh, it's, it's that old fashioned kind of making those connections. I, you know, I, uh, I tell people that I don't, I don't have a lot of marketable skills, but what I do have is I know somebody, right? And so, I, I pride myself [00:45:00] in being someone that's a networker and a collaborator. And if I don't know them, I'll find them, right? But anytime I finish a conversation, I end with this.

So, who else do you know that I should talk to? Who else do you know that I should talk to about this work that we're doing? And I think as you engage with

faith leaders and as you engage with people in your community to ask that question, who else do you know? What, what faith organization do you know in the community that feels really passionately about recovery or about feeding people or about kind of being involved in mission or work in the community, who else do you know that I should talk to? Who else do you know that might be willing to, to kind of make those connections? Um, and being willing to, to really ask those questions and ask for those introductions, I think is an important piece.

[00:45:45] **Janice Fulkerson:** So Matt, I think that leads into one of the tactical questions that that came in, which is how do you find the faith leaders in your community, um, that ministerial organization or association that, um, Ernie [00:46:00] Fletcher mentioned? Yeah. How did, is it a simple Google, uh, do you, how do you find them?

[00:46:06] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** I mean, I don't know how we got, how we. Along before Google. But yeah, a a, a web search of, uh, of, of those places could be one of those ways you do that. Uh, it could be literally knocking on a door and so, um, pulling up in a, in a church parking lot, uh, or faith organization's parking lot, knocking on the door and, and seeing who's there.

Um, finding that for the, those faith leaders that, that are there and, and again, so much of, of the way that I have found this works in life it's just, um, finding the right people to make those introductions and to make those connections. And so that, that's part of it too. Um, now I would tell you I wouldn't, um, I wouldn't spam faith leaders with a bunch of emails or unsolicited mailings.

Cause um, when I was doing, [00:47:00] when I was doing local work, we got a lot of those. But for somebody to walk in and say. You know, I'd love to set up an appointment with you for 30 minutes to tell you about what we're doing and to tell you about what's happening. Lots of times people will make time for that. And so again, it's that personal connection.

It's that personal relationship that really can show your passion, your vision, and your hope for what's happening. Uh, that's, that's really beneficial.

[00:47:23] **Janice Fulkerson:** Thank you Matt. Um, I'll just share a couple of ideas that I've had very positive outcomes with, um, in our local newspaper, both online and in the print edition, um, they rotate through faith leaders who provide a weekly, uh, message. Um, and they rotate through a variety of, uh, different. And I've reached out to a couple of them directly to say, I enjoyed

your column, and I was wondering if I could talk to you about this recovery initiative And the response has been very good.

[00:47:55] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Yeah. An open house with an invitation to an open house to come see the work that you're [00:48:00] doing is one of those benefits. Right. I mean, you know, kind of come see us on this, on this Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon and see what we're doing. Um, see the, the impact we're making in our community. That's one of those benefits for sure.

[00:48:14] **Janice Fulkerson:** Great. I think that concludes the questions that have come through the chat in the Q and A. There's been several requests for the copy of the presentation to be mailed and made available, so I just wanna make sure everybody knows at FletcherGroup.org you can find a copy of this presentation and all of our webinars, uh, on our website.

This one will be available next week along with a transcription and the PowerPoint. Um, we also have the availability to respond to technical assistance questions. So, at FletcherGroup.org you can find a host [00:49:00] of tool kits and documents and um, papers that are available for you to use in your work. Um, and you can also find Matt's bio and his email's been put in the chat and he's left it up here for you to contact him.

[00:49:14] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Yeah, I would love to talk with you about ways that we can partner together and ways that we can kind of grow these community partnerships. Cause I really do think there's so much, um, opportunity for us to, to, to develop community partnerships that are meaningful and significant and so ways that I can help us do that. I would, I would absolutely love to continue to help do that work.

Janice Fulkerson: Thank you very much. Any closing comments, Matt or, uh, Governor Fletcher before we sign off?

[00:49:45] **Dr. Ernie Fletcher:** I just want to, you know, as we're entering the holidays, just wish everyone, um, Happy Holidays, uh, whatever your holiday is and Merry Christmas if it's that. But thank you all for attending. I know we've had a number of folks and we look forward to working with you, [00:50:00] um, tremendous community to tap into. A lot of you already reading your comments or, you know, already doing a lot of this good work and we just want to say thank you for what you're doing. Really appreciate it.

[00:50:11] **Dr. Matt Johnson:** Yeah, absolutely. I, I'm, I'm so glad that we get to, to get, to share this and, um, you know, this, this, uh, a ability to make these connections I think really is what's going to help kind of bring hope and healing to so many people. Um, you know, we think of that kind of idea at, at, at the holiday season of, of light and life becoming a reality.

And uh, as we kind of celebrate that, even in the midst of what are becoming darker days, literally as you know, I think the sun went down here at five o'clock yesterday. We continue to hold out that belief that there is light that is available to us, that we get to offer and get the, to share together. And when we partner those lights, it becomes a much greater force for good in the world. It's good to be able to do that, but thanks for, thanks for [00:51:00] joining us today and, and I look forward to, to continuing to share and to work with folks as much as possible.

[00:51:16] **Michelle Day:** This concludes our webinar session. Thank you so much for joining us today. Also, please tune in on the first Thursday of each month from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time, where we will be hosting subject matter experts from across the nation to bring you valuable tools and resources for rural recovery house operators and SUD professionals.

If you would like information on technical assistance, you can go to our website again, www.FletcherGroup.org, which I have also copied in the chat, and submit technical assistance. Lastly, please take a moment to respond to the survey questions once they become available on your screen. Your feedback is very important and greatly appreciated.

Thank you and have a blessed day.[00:52:00]