

Valley Pastoral Counseling Center, Inc.

OUTREACH

Summer 2014

Providing Spiritually Sensitive Psychotherapy to the Shenandoah Valley Since 1980

300 Chestnut Ave - Waynesboro, VA 22980 540-943-8722 540-886-5757 www.valleypastoral.org

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Resident in Counseling

In This Edition

In this edition we discover that transitions in life are unavoidable. So, we have included several articles about recent changes at VPCC in leadership, information about our training programs and our satellite office in Charlottesville. There is also an article directed toward the survivors of suicide. We sincerely hope this information will encourage everyone to explore life's transitions with us.

After 6 years of leading the team at Valley Pastoral Counseling Center in Waynesboro, Emilie Slechta Thomas, M.A, LMFT, has passed the Executive Director baton to C. Alan Melton, D. Min., LPC. Mrs. Thomas joined VPCC in 2006 as a full time psychotherapist and Education Director. She accepted the Executive Director position in 2008. Under her leadership the Center increased the number of therapy associates to better meet the needs of our growing community and reorganized its administrative structure to include new posts such as Outreach Coordinator and Training Coordinator. Under her tenure VPCC also expanded its presence to the Charlottesville community through a Resident Counselor in Training who treats clients in a satellite office in that area. Though the ride has been rich and rewarding, Mrs. Thomas feels ready to focus on her family, her therapy practice, and her creative interests. She continues to serve at VPCC as a pastoral psychotherapist and has assumed the role of Training Coordinator as well, acting as the liaison with educational programs in the region which train new therapists and VPCC's clinical supervisors who extend that training into practice.

Dr. Melton assumed the role of Executive Director on April 1, 2014 after having served previously in a number of administrative positions at VPCC over the years since his arrival at VPCC in 1995, including a previous tenure as Executive Director, Dr. Melton felt that this was a good time in his professional life to renew his role as Director given the possible changes the Affordable Care Act may bring to the functioning of the Center. He has enjoyed serving as Training Coordinator in recent years and was pleased regarding VPCC's recent accomplishment of becoming a Level One Approved Training Center of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors through his efforts. Dr. Melton has continued to serve as a full time therapist and clinical supervisor as he steps into the part time position of Executive Director.

Charlottesville Satellite Office

Valley Pastoral Counseling Center (VPCC) and our Resident, Melissa Hansen, have partnered with University Baptist Church in Charlottesville, VA to provide pastoral counseling services in that area. Melissa has a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Gordon College in Wenham, MA, and a Master of Science in Mental Health Counseling from Capella University. She is working as a Resident in Counseling at VPCC and toward licensure as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the state of Virginia under the clinical supervision of C. Alan Melton, D.Min., LPC who is also an Associate at VPCC.

Melissa sees clients in Charlottesville at University Baptist Church (1223 W. Main Street, Charlottesville, VA, 293-5106) on Mondays between 8 am and 7 pm. She will add additional times as necessary.

Melissa has worked in a variety of settings. She is experienced in working with individual adults, couples, families, groups, children, and adolescents. Melissa especially enjoys working with her clients on relational issues, personality challenges, personal growth and spirituality concerns.

VPCC Training Opportunities

Valley Pastoral Counseling Center offers two types of training opportunities. As an Institutional Affiliate of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, we offer an intensive Pastoral Care Specialist certificate program which is open to both clergy and laypersons and provides training in brief supportive pastoral care and counseling. Successful completion of the program also provides eligibility for the Pastoral Care Specialist membership level in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

VPCC also offers training and clinical supervision approved by the Virginia Board of Counseling for licensure candidates in the mental health field at the practicum, intern, and residency levels. Openings are limited; therefore we suggest interested candidates inquire early in their programs about availability.

If you would like more information about either of the above opportunities please contact Emilie Thomas, Training Coordinator, by email at pastoral @ntelos.net or by phone at (540) 932-1476.

The Importance of our Client Assistance Fund

Through the years our Client Assistance Fund has provided the opportunity for those with limited resources to receive services here at Valley Pastoral Counseling Center. It has provided the opportunity for the underinsured, underemployed, and other non-Medicaid underprivileged to take advantage of the unique services we offer. Unfortunately, donations to the fund have been insufficient to address the growing need of the elderly for our special type of service. The need has further intensified since the Baby Boomer generation is now entering that phase of life. Due to Medicare regulations, which exclude Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists from compensation for their services, those who have Medicare as their primary insurance are not able to access our services during a very critical time of their lives. Since Medicare excludes LPC's and LMFT's from compensation, those with secondary insurance such as Anthem and others, have their benefits denied and are left to pay for our services out of pocket. Unfortunately, after retirement, many retirees struggle to make ends meet. Not only do they have to make choices about whether to buy food or pay for needed medications, they are denied access to critical mental health services. Studies have shown this population to be significantly underserved by mental health providers due to current laws and many elderly who live in or near the poverty level. There have been several bipartisan attempts in Congress to pass legislation to solve the problem; however, those efforts have continued to be blocked. Currently there is legislation in both houses intended to address the issue of access to mental health services for the elderly. Please contact your Congressman and Senators to encourage them to vote for legislation that will significantly improve access to mental health services for the elderly.

Until legislation is passed to resolve this issue, we have to depend on private donations to help improve access to mental health services for the elderly and the disabled who receive Medicare. As with many other people, when issues arise in the life of the elderly, there are related spiritual issues and questions. At Valley Pastoral Counseling Center we are uniquely qualified to assist the elderly in working through those spiritual questions. However, we need an increase in funding to help us provide those services. We are a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization; consequently, your contributions are tax deductible. If you are interested in donating to our Client Assistance Fund please contact Alan Melton, Executive Director of VPCC at (540) 943-8722 or send a check in the mail to Valley Pastoral Counseling Center, 300 Chestnut Ave., Waynesboro, VA. 22980 and specify that it is a donation to the Client Assistance Fund.

A Note to the Survivors of Suicide

By Bill Huffman M.Div., M.A., LPC

This is being written as Robin William's death and his struggle with mental illness and alcoholism is in the news. It has been reported on news channels such as CNN and others that he had become severely depressed, anxious, in the early stages of Parkinson's and was manic-depressive. Officials determined that he took his own life. We remember him as a hilariously funny impromptu comedian with little indication of his internal turmoil, struggle with the early stages of Parkinson's disease or his abuse of alcohol. The disorder that fueled his genius also fueled

his despair and eventually led to his death. He will be greatly missed by many, especially his family. One can only imagine how heartbroken his wife and children are at this time; the questions they may be pondering, the anger, frustration, and confusion associated with such a violent passing. Violent passing you ask?

Yes, suicide is a violent goodbye. It's sudden, quick, seldom truly expected, and always through violent means. It can leave families in disarray with disbelief and after the funeral, extremely complex grief. Suicide forces us to experience the violent, premature death of our children, parents, siblings, and friends. It is an experience like no other and the questions are like those from no other experience. For people of faith, those questions include the eternal destination of their loved one. They ask, "Isn't suicide a sin; how can they go to Heaven?" And yet there is the possibility of an even more intense experience to complicate their grief.

Often a surviving family member is the one who discovers the death scene. Imagine, if you can for a moment, the shock and despair of walking unsuspectingly into a room only to find your loved one dead by the actions of their own hands. These gruesome scenes often portray the violence and desperation of the goodbye and may leave a family member wondering what it would be like to die that kind of death. There may be times when a surviving family member, in the midst of intense grief and depression, will "test the waters" to see if they can understand what their loved one experienced as they died. Occasionally that person is successful in completing the act themselves. Depression, as a result of the experience of suicide, can be intense and deadly. Survivors of suicide can't handle it "in their own way".

Don't suffer in silence. Seek professional help and call us here at VPCC to work through the experience of complex grief associated with suicide. Our therapists are equipped to help suicide survivors move through the grief process and help them find answers to the questions that haunt them.

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COUNSELING CENTER**
300 CHESTNUT AVENUE
Waynesboro, VA 22980

New Website Design!

At VPCC we recognize the need for ease of access to our information for our potential clients. This need has led us to have our website redesigned and we are very excited about the new look and other improvements.

Improvements include a map and driving directions, more information about our services, ease of use, and the inclusion of our newsletter as well as important information about our Associates.

Note to Pastors

We are requesting that Pastors in the area provide VPCC with an email address so that we may supply an electronic copy of our newsletter to them. Electronic copies are easily distributed to your congregations through your distribution list. Please send your email address to pastoral@ntelos.net.

IT IS OKAY TO SEEK HELP!

It is easy to schedule an appointment with us. Please contact Stephanie Sterling at (540) 932-9722 and give your name and number. Ms. Sterling or one of our Associates will return your call and discuss scheduling an appointment. You will be warmly welcomed with care, compassion and understanding. For general information please call (540) 943-8722 or (540) 886-5757.

Great News!

VPCC has been designated as a Category 1 Pastoral Care Specialist Training Center by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. The training program has been designed for those who have theological training and who desire to provide care to individuals of various religious traditions. Training and supervision is provided by the Associates at VPCC. For information about the program or to schedule an interview please contact Emilie Thomas LMFT at (540) 932-1476.

