

LEADING THE WAY

Mental Health & the Church

An astonishing one in five people who visit or belong to your church has a mental health concern. Anxiety is on the rise among our young people and along with it, suicide. Clinical depression keeps many from experiencing the love of Christ and addictions rob people of relationships and their future.

In an effort to respond to these growing needs, Winebrenner’s Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling (MACC) program hosted its first ever Mental Health & the Church conference for pastors, lay-leaders, and counseling practitioners. The November 9th, 2019 half-day conference led participants to better understand, embrace, and respond to the uniqueness and gifts of those with mental health concerns.

The event’s main speaker was Dr. Stephen Grcevich (MD, Northeast Ohio Medical University), a child and adolescent psychiatrist who combines



“We are quick to focus on what people can’t do, while overlooking the God-given gifts and talents everyone has been given to contribute to the fulfillment of the church’s mission in the world.” Dr. Stephen Grcevich

over 25 years of knowledge gained through clinical practice and teaching. His book, *Mental Health and the Church*, was published by Zondervan in February 2018.

Dr. Grcevich exhorted church leaders to make simple adjustments to the “church experience,” making worship, teaching, and fellowship accessible to those with mental health concerns.

Something as simple as providing seats near an exit enables those with anxiety to attend service and engage according to their comfort level.

In addition to two plenary sessions, participants could choose two of four breakout sessions led by MACC faculty, alumni, and students:

- Supporting those with addictions
- Effectively helping those who are grieving a suicide and other losses
- Effectively ministering to children (and their families) with autism, anger, anxiety, and ADHD
- Dismantling the shame surrounding mental illness in the Church

Approximately 100 leaders from various churches as well as para-church and service organizations attended the conference.



Engaged in table discussion is counselor Kendra Bermosk (MA, LPCC-S) who works with university students. To her right is Pastor Jason Hinkle (MDiv) who serves in Lima, Ohio.

DR. KELLI JO ARNDT, DIRECTOR OF THE MACC PROGRAM

Equipping Christ-Centered Counselors

Winebrenner Seminary's Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling (MACC) program commenced in January of 2015. The idea behind the program originated with Dr. Jim Allen who was Winebrenner's VP of Institutional Advancement at the time. As a former pastor, Dr. Allen saw a need for counselors who could assist others with mental health issues from both a clinical and spiritual perspective.

Launching the program allowed me to use my God given talents to create curriculum that intentionally combines secular psychology with biblical truths. Joining Winebrenner has furthered God's call on my life, drawing on my knowledge of counseling and my experience in the field. I am passionate about engaging students in coursework that provides personal, spiritual, and professional growth opportunities.

The MACC is a 69 credit hour program which prepares students to help others heal and overcome social, psychological, and spiritual difficulties. Throughout their tenure

in the program, students learn to provide hope and encouragement to others in various counseling settings. These venues include, but are not limited to: hospitals, inpatient and outpatient treatment centers, community mental health centers, private practices, college campuses, and bereavement centers. Students are also prepared to pass the state licensure exam, for which Winebrenner has a 92% passing rate.

The theological courses (9 credit hours) are key to the program because they build on one's relationship with Jesus, his or her current understanding of Scripture, and his or her spiritual formation. Students are challenged to grow closer to God and in this way, they are better equipped to help others in need of such direction.

Students intentionally choose Winebrenner because they desire to be educated from a holistic perspective. They desire hands-on learning led by faculty who can challenge them both academically *and spiritually*. Our students love being part of a small



Dr. Arndt and Academic Dean, Dr. Coats, proudly hold the MACC programs's certificate of accreditation, recently renewed by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

community of Christian learners. They feel connected to one another, God, and their instructors.

Students from our theology programs can also take MACC classes, preparing them to better care for people in their ministries. In addition, members of the public in our surrounding communities may audit many of the MACC courses to gain knowledge on much needed topics such as addictions and loss.

God has been faithful to grow the MACC program and is using our faculty, alumni, and students to impact our respective communities for His glory. I invite you to contact me directly if you or someone you know is sensing God's call to serve Him through clinical mental health counseling. Contact our office and I would be privileged to engage in your story.



Dr. Kelli Jo Arndt is the Director of Winebrenner's Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling program. She is captured here leading a breakout session on addictions for Winebrenner's fall 2019 Mental Health & the Church conference.

ALUMNA LESLIE FERN, LPC & SUD CLINICAL THERAPIST

Called to Counsel with Hope & Compassion

When Leslie Fern completed her undergraduate and graduate work in Human Resources, she was done with studying and the all-encompassing gruel of student life. She settled into a full time HR position and forged ahead in her new life as a working adult.

For 20 years, Leslie's life was full and meaningful. She cared for family members, volunteered at church, and advanced at work. As the years progressed, Leslie increasingly felt she was created for something more. She and her family had been through some hard trials and those times had afforded her a unique perspective on brokenness and what it means to come alongside those who are hurting. She was definitely serving others through her HR position, but Leslie heard God calling her to use her gifts in a new way.

She began to research accredited grad schools offering counseling degrees. **Because she felt strongly about incorporating her faith in her education, she applied at Winebrenner Seminary.** In the fall of 2015, Leslie started classes in Winebrenner's Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling program. Unlike her previous studies, Leslie was now juggling a full-time job on top of class time and homework. The grad level courses were challenging and she felt stretched. Fear of failure began to override her original motivation to be in the program. She completed the second trimester, but did not register for further classes. (Continued on back page)



Leslie Fern is pictured above on her graduation day this past August 2019.

From the Desk of Dr. Mary Iames

In addition to teaching at Winebrenner in the MACC program, I work as a school counselor in Lima, Ohio. In spring 2019, I asked a friend to suggest local mental health services to which I could refer my African American students. The discussion that ensued led me to read the 2017 Allen County Health Risk and Community Needs Assessment. In that report, I made some startling discoveries.

For one, the report states that 58% of "Allen County African American adults [deal] with stress through prayer/meditation." Secondly, all adults in the survey reported that they receive social and emotional support through: family (76%), friends, (67%), God/prayer (45%), and church (29%). Professional counseling was listed last at only 4%. I was stunned by

these findings. If my students' parents do not seek professional counseling for themselves, then why would they seek it for their children? But what if these families' churches were equipped to respond to their mental health needs? And what if their pastors and youth leaders were trained to both recognize and care for mental health concerns? Even if families do not attend a church regularly, the statistics show they are more likely to seek



help from their church than they are from a counseling professional.

I began to dream of how Winebrenner Seminary could come alongside pastors and ministry leaders and equip them to better care for the many individuals and families who struggle with mental health concerns. True, Winebrenner's theology students already have access to many of our counseling courses, but I wanted to make this kind of training available to the ministry leaders and churches at large, in our community. And so our first ever Mental Health & the Church conference was born. (See front page for all the details.)

Thanks to the overwhelming success of the first conference, planning has already begun for further training in 2020.

Pictured to the left, Dr. Mary Iames passionately welcomes participants to the Mental Health & the Church event.

LESLIE FERN (CONT.)

Weeks later, Leslie met a friend on the Winebrenner campus and she observed the hustle and bustle of her former classmates. Being there also reminded her of the time when a Winebrenner professor and his wife prayed with a student right in the hallway. Leslie had a deep sense that she once again belonged in that God-honoring setting.

Director Dr. Kelli Jo Arndt noticed Leslie visiting and felt God nudging her to reach out. She called Leslie later that week at work and boldly said, "You belong here. Let's get together and talk." With God already speaking to her, Leslie agreed to meet. After a heart to heart with Dr. Arndt, Leslie realized that she needed to let go of her fear and follow the path that God had set for her. Even Winebrenner's tag line—"Follow His Call"—was speaking to her!

She was humbled by Dr. Arndt's belief in her. **This esteemed professor and counselor saw something in Leslie that she did not see in herself.** With renewed vision and a workable plan for managing her schedule, Leslie signed up for the following trimester. She was doing this!

After graduating in August 2019, Leslie finished up her internship at Harbor, a community mental health agency in Toledo. She passed her licensure exam and was offered a full-time position at Harbor in the area of alcohol and other drugs. Her greatest motivation in her current role is the clients themselves. She shares that the majority simply don't have anyone in their corner and it is a privilege to see people dig deep and rise up out of addiction.

Many of her clients mention their faith in God which then opens the door for Leslie to draw on her theology training to give them guidance and lasting hope. **"All the spiritual components poured into me and woven into my education help me now to serve with compassion in the power of the Holy Spirit."**

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