



# LIBERATION. LOVE. HARM REDUCTION.

www.faithinharmreduction.org

## Welcome Letter



### Welcome to the Faith in Harm Reduction May Newsletter!

Thank you to everyone who read the first edition of the Faith in Harm Reduction Newsletter. This month we are featuring some of the amazing work of Elder George Gibson in Florida with **Set Free Ministries Church/ Flashlight of Hope** and Rev Chris Scott in West Virginia with **Ezekiel Project**. In each issue we will feature a partner organization and spiritual leader and share their transformative work. If you know an organization or leader we should highlight please reach out to us at [elizabeth@ncchurches.org](mailto:elizabeth@ncchurches.org)

Also the you will see we have tons of events coming up and would love to see you at some of these. We hope you have a good Memorial Day and a great start to the summer.

## Spiritual Leader Spotlight



Our Spiritual Leader this month is Elder George N. Gibson. Elder George is founder and pastor/teacher of Set Free Ministries through Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith Church, Inc., Miami, Florida, U.S.A. **Set Free Ministries Church and Flashlight of Hope** which does education on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), tuberculosis (TB), and other life challenging illnesses (e.g., lupus, cancer, leukemia, ebola, coronavirus, etc.). Also, it operates a syringe exchange program and an AIDS ministry, health & wellness ministry, and bereavement support group. Other educational services include but not limited to the following: Domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape, human trafficking, gay and lesbian issues, crisis assessment and intervention, parenting skills, and information and referrals (I & R's).

### #1 How Do You Connect Faith/Spirit and Harm Reduction?

I connect my faith and harm reduction as saving a life. Before I start discussing syringe exchange, safer sex, and Naloxone (narcan), I want to say that I totally agree with religious leaders who believe 100% in abstinence. Abstinence is the only sure way to not get HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), blood-borne pathogens, and tuberculosis (TB). There is *safer* sex but not *safe* sex unless a person is abstinent. 1 Peter 2:11 and Romans 12:1 say, "... abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*" **However, some people are not going to abstain. For that reason, people should be given education (brochures, pamphlets, handouts, et cetera) and prevention items (sterile syringes, cookers, condoms, dental dams, et cetera). The two go hand in hand. What's more, Naloxone (narcan) for drug overdoses saves lives too!** I have to try to save people's lives while they are living so that I can try to get their souls saved. Leviticus 17:11 says, "For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood..." I have to draw people to Christ through love and in a nonjudgmental manner. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."What's more, I believe that spirituality and syringe exchange are compatible from a social justice point-of-view and for humanitarian reasons.

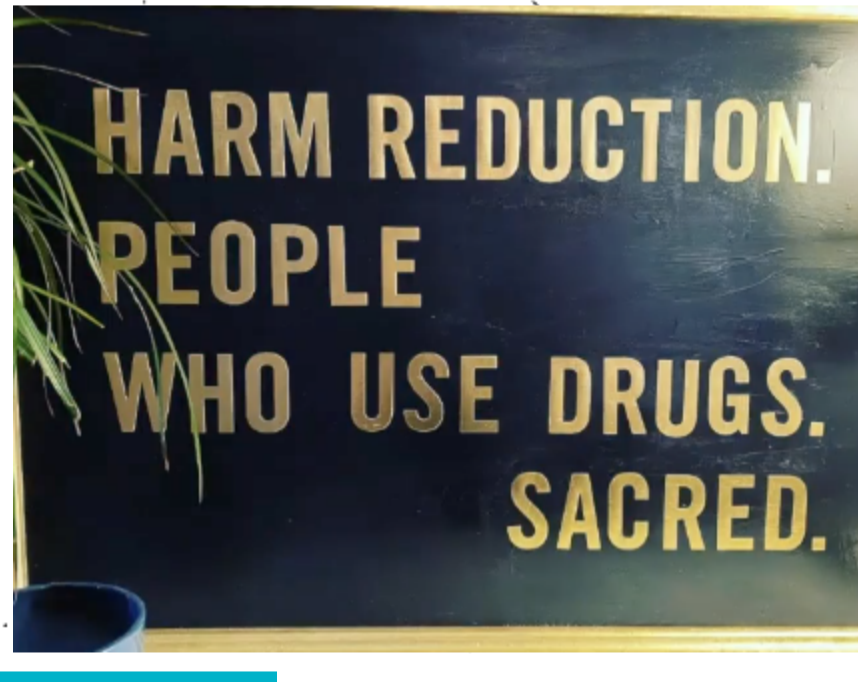
### #2 How Do You Ground Yourself / Practice Self-Care / Community Care?

I got involved with HIV/AIDS, STD's and TB when I saw panels from the AIDS Memorial Quilt through the Names Project. A late friend and I volunteered when it was on display at the Miami Beach Convention Center. I was moved with compassion to want to do something about HIV/AIDS issues! Each panel is 3 feet (0.91 meters) X 6 feet (1.8 meters). This is approximately the size of a human grave! That's alarming! There were lots of panels on display! Those people were not just statistics but someone's significant other, family member, friend, neighbor, and the list goes on! My faith in God is what sustains me. I pray, read my Bible, meditate, tarry on the altar (prayer and tarrying services), and fast sometimes. By giving back to my community is what gives me life. I volunteer by giving my time, talents, and gifts. When I became ordained as an elder (minister) and pastor, I wanted to do even more. I am now a trained chaplain and bereavement support group facilitator. Moreover, when my mother's life expired on April 29, 2021, I wanted to do even more for the community. I facilitate a bereavement support group. This is a general support group whether the person died from a drug overdose or something else. Also, I set up a table exhibit with information on health and human services at public libraries. I want to be sure that people get the many resources that are available.

### #3 Why Do You Have Faith in Harm Reduction?

I am going to rephrase the question from "faith" to "believe" in harm reduction. All of my faith is in God and in Him alone (Psalm 118:8, 9 and 146:3)! I believe that harm reduction does not encourage people to use drugs. They are going to use them anyhow! People who are forced into treatment are likely to be unsuccessful. They have to get tired of using drugs and seek help on their own. That change has to come from a within people and with a well-made up mind! 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, **"Prove** all things; hold fast that which is good." It has already been **proven** through evidenced-based research that condoms, dental dams, needle exchange programs, et cetera are effective barriers!!!

To learn more about Elder George and support **Set Free Ministries Church/ Flashlight of Hope** [click here](#).



## Faith in Action

- In you are in North Carolina you can join us at the North Carolina Drug User Health Summit which will have a panel on Faith in Harm Reduction [https://www.seaetc.com/event/?ER\\_ID=85516](https://www.seaetc.com/event/?ER_ID=85516)
- Check out our Spirit of Harm Reduction Toolkit <https://harmreduction.org/issues/harm-reduction-basics/spirit-of-harm-reduction-a-toolkit-for-communities-of-faith-facing-overdose/>
- Sign on to the Overdose Prevention Center Faith Leader Sign On Letter [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScS-5c9hEAaVIGe3VYbXsqTKPUVwVsm8xJ49yBDiOKFEN5UFg/viewform?usp=pf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScS-5c9hEAaVIGe3VYbXsqTKPUVwVsm8xJ49yBDiOKFEN5UFg/viewform?usp=pf_link)
- Learn more about Safe Consumption Spaces in this one pager <https://docs.google.com/document/d/17nrZEM9zBz-B9v6wPv6EMlK4bzZemN7wACck4/edit>
- If you are in North Carolina please consider signing on to this letter around the opioid settlement funds. The majority of the distribution of these funds in North Carolina will be decided by local county commissioners and other county leaders. In an effort to ensure the funds are spent on evidence-based solutions that center the people most impacted, we have created a sign-on letter that will be sent to county commissioners. [You can read the letter here.](#) We know that faith leaders are influential in their communities and your support in this effort is appreciated. [If you would like to sign on, please do so here.](#)
- Watch our workshop at Ecumenical Advocacy Days Mobilizing Faith in Harm Reduction to End Overdose and War on People Who Use Drugs. Ecumenical Advocacy Days is a yearly gathering of faith-based Christian organizers, activists and advocates to inspire thoughtful reflection on the current issues of our day and build capacity for taking action for social change toward justice. Get more info and watch the recording: <https://www.accevents.com/eu/checkout/eadvirtual2022/tickets/order>
- Register for the National Harm Reduction Conference <https://conference.harmreduction.org/registration/>

## Partner Highlight



Our partner highlight this month is the **Ezekiel Project** in West Virginia.

It was a sweltering summer day in Logan WV, and Melissa was leaving downtown to head home for the day. Out of nowhere, she felt a pull on her heart that said, "go back, Melissa." She kept driving, but the pull got too strong to ignore, "go back, Melissa, go back." Melissa turned her car around and returned to downtown Logan. She saw a man who had collapsed on the sidewalk. She rushed out of her car with her purse, and noticed the man's face turning blue. Melissa quickly gave the man naloxone, and the dose revived him long enough for medical professionals to arrive. Melissa received her naloxone at a training held at Nighbert Memorial United Methodist Church, led by The Ezekiel Project. Melissa now sits on the Leadership Team for The Ezekiel Project.

The Ezekiel Project is a faith-based movement to save lives, eliminate stigma against people who use drugs, and promote harm reduction across West Virginia. The Ezekiel Project draws its name from Ezekiel 37:5. This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: "I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life." In coordination with harm reduction advocates, pharmacologists, The Ezekiel Project is building a faith movement to confront the opioid crisis with hope and healing across the Mountain State. Due to the stigma associated with illicit drug use, people are often hesitant to reach out for themselves and their loved ones. We don't claim to know all the answers, which is why local, state, and national partnerships have made all the difference. Wherever The Ezekiel Project does naloxone training, we connect participants with organizations and agencies working in their own backyards. These trainings have also become a space where people can be open and honest about how the opioid crisis has affected them.

Our current goal is to train 37 faith communities in West Virginia by August 31, 2022, which is Overdose Awareness Day. We are well underway that goal, having trained 25 faith communities in all parts of the state. You can learn more about our work at <https://www.facebook.com/ezekielprojectwv>

## Wisdom Saying of the Month

Not above me.  
Not below me.  
Beside me.

—Jess Tilley,  
New England User's Union

+ Share a prayer/poem/spiritual saying with us. Let us know if we have permission to share your prayer submission on our website or newsletter.

<https://faithinharmreduction.org/prayer-submission>

Want to tell us more, contact us here at [Elizabeth@ncchurches.org](mailto:Elizabeth@ncchurches.org) or at <https://faithinharmreduction.org/>

