

Addiction recovery has pastoral approach at Father Martin's Ashley

Treatment center on banks of Chesapeake Bay has counseled more than 24,000 people in 25 years

By Joseph Ryan
Assistant editor

HAVRE DE GRACE, Md. — Father Mark Hushen's new "parish" sits on the Chesapeake Bay just south of the mouth of the Susquehanna River. The former pastor of Wilmington's St. Anthony of Padua Parish oversees Father Martin's Ashley in Havre de Grace, a rehabilitation residence on a tranquil 43-acre campus where about 85 patients a month are treated for alcoholism or chemical dependency.



Father Martin

Founded 25 years ago by Sulpician Father Joseph C. Martin and Mae Abraham, the secular treatment center has a tradition of adding pastoral expertise to its care for patients.

Father Hushen, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, joined Ashley last year, succeeding Rev. Leonard A. Dahl, a Protestant minister, as president and CEO.

Father Hushen said the chance to be a CEO and a pastor simultaneously is what made the job appealing.

"It's like being a teacher, a preacher and a counselor at the same time," he said in his office by the bay.

Father Hushen, 48, was drawn to drug and alcohol counseling during his seminary days.

"I got into a counseling program at Catholic University and one of the internships I did was at a drug and alcohol treatment facility. I found out I have a whole set of skills that work in this field," he said. "When I was living in Wilmington I got to meet a lot of people and the recovering community began to invite me to do retreats. I thought, this is great ministry and I need to be doing this full-time, but it took a whole bunch of years and more preparation before I was ready to do it."

The priest, who grew up in Manoa, Pa., served at St. Anthony's from 1994 until 2001, including four years as pastor. He was pastoral care director at Caron Treatment Center in Wernersville, Pa., before joining Ashley in 2007.

"I can see God's hand in all of it, because the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales fits hand-in-glove with the 12 steps [the suggested program of recovery developed by Alcoholics Anonymous]," Father Hushen said. "I use the teachings of St. Francis de Sales here all the time. The community really responds. They have a real hunger and thirst for spirituality and to be able to present it in a way that feeds them is really wonderful."

In addition to his administrative work, the priest celebrates Mass there about four times a week, lectures, counsels one-on-one,

administers the sacrament of the sick and hears confessions.

Ashley's chapel features its logo, a circle of oak leaves in the colors of the seasons. The image reflects Ashley's motto,

The recovering community has "a real hunger and thirst for spirituality," says Father Mark Hushen.



Courtesy Father Martin's Ashley

Oblate Father Mark Hushen, president and CEO of Father Martin's Ashley, says his job combines teaching, preaching and counseling.

"Through Death to Life."

"That's very much paschal mystery," Father Hushen said, referring to the Christian belief in the redemptive nature of Christ's death and resurrection. "Everything I do here is paschal mystery, but people don't recognize that because I don't use that language."

Noting how the beauty of Ashley's location strikes patients and visitors, Father Hushen said, "Our physical campus is just as much of a healing agent as our lectures and the group therapy because it's the work of the creator. If you're connected to that power, how can you not heal?"

That healing for more than 24,000 patients during Ashley's quarter-century comes after the deathlike grip of addiction.

The road to recovery begins when family

members see that a relative needs help, an employer requires rehab to stay employed, legal problems, such as charges of driving while intoxicated, or health problems call for a 28-day residential program.

The month costs \$20,800, Father Hushen said. The cost can be covered in full or partially by insurance benefits.

Powerful form of community

About 65 percent of Ashley's patients are admitted for alcoholism, while others are addicted to drugs. "The majority of folks are cross-addicted," Father Hushen said.

"In a spiritual sense, what addiction represents is a misguided spiritual journey.

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Pitfalls of teen drinking brought into focus at town hall meeting

By Elissa Serrao
Staff reporter

WILMINGTON — Parents, teachers and students gathered last week at Salesianum School for a town hall meeting led by Father Mark Hushen, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales and president of Father Martin's Ashley, a drug and alcohol treatment center in Havre de Grace, Md. Part of the U.S. Surgeon General's nationwide effort, the meeting focused on underage consumption of alcohol — a problem that, Father Hushen said, "has reached epidemic proportions."

He was joined on a panel by John Downs, a Delaware prosecutor and former New Castle County police officer, Dr. Myria Mack-Williams, a pediatrician at Christiana Care, Yvonne Nass, a parent educator, and Kevin Ganc, a former Salesianum student.

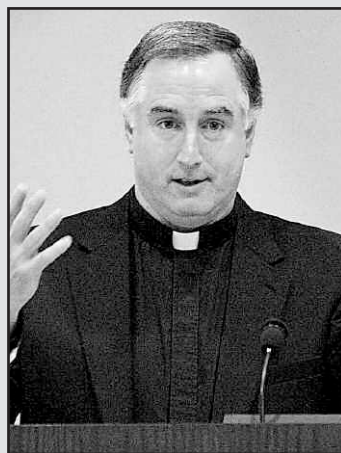
Father Hushen reflected on his experience dealing with the effects of underage drinking on

patients in the treatment center. "All patients in their young 20s began their journey into addiction as teenagers. And that's scary," he said.

The facts are even more sobering. According to the Surgeon General, Father Hushen said, children who drink before age 15 are 40 percent more likely to become alcoholics than children who don't drink. Most young adults ages 18 through 20 who drink have already become dependent on alcohol.

"A whole generation of kids is lost due to this type of behavior," he said. "Many fail out of school and partake in at-risk sexual behaviors, subjecting them to rape, abortion, HIV and STDs. The pain these youth are experiencing is more than an adult may have experienced in a lifetime."

To prevent the problem from spreading, he said, societal attitudes on alcohol need to change — parents need to understand that alcohol can harm the adolescent



The Dialog/Don Blake

Father Mark Hushen

brain just like drugs can.

Mack-Williams spoke about the physical damage alcohol can cause. Because the adolescent brain is still developing, she said, "it's particularly vulnerable to alcohol. Abuse can impact memory, motor skills and overall brain function."

Unfortunately, the mental and

physical ramifications aren't the only concerns when it comes to underage alcohol consumption. It's also illegal.

Downs recalled his days as a New Castle County police officer, when he responded to calls reporting underage parties. "When adolescents get in trouble with the law due to drinking, parents are quick to want to make it go away," he said. He encouraged parents to acknowledge if they have a child in crisis. "They need to confront what may be there even though they don't want to see it."

Downs reminded parents that police are not required to tell them their child has been arrested if they are 18 or older. "When I'm a cop and they are 18," he said, "they may be your baby, but to me they're adults."

Ganc spoke of how his involvement with underage drinking landed him in legal trouble while he was a sophomore at the University of Delaware.

Although charges were eventually dropped, he blames his use of alcohol for ruining the majority of his sophomore year. "Use your knowledge to make good decisions," he said. "Not everyone will be as lucky as me."

Parents listened intently during the question-and-answer session as Father Hushen listed signs a teen may be abusing alcohol. Major signs include changes in behavior, mood, peer group, academic performance and motivation levels.

Parent Martin McCarrick of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Wilmington brought his teenage son, John, to the meeting.

"I hope my son will hear something that will prevent him from drinking before he turns 21," McCarrick said. "Underage drinking is something that's not talked about enough between him and me — this will hopefully allow more open discussion in our home."

Ashley's 'sole purpose is to heal,' priest says

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People who have that hunger or thirst are trying to satisfy it with alcohol, drugs, nicotine, caffeine, all kinds of substances. Augustine said it best: our hearts are restless until they rest in God. People in recovery get that, and they work on their 12-step program that gets them back on track and back on their way home."

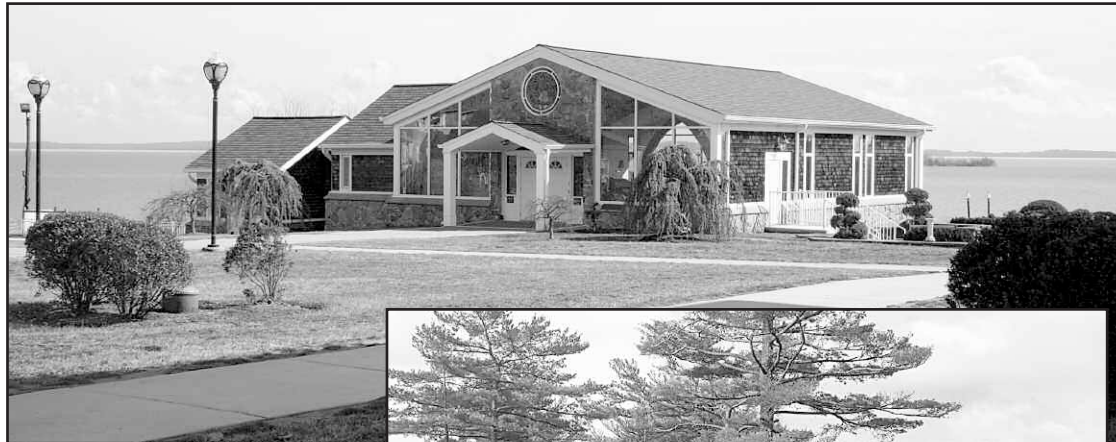
Father Hushen finds the fellowship that surrounds Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous programs "probably the most powerful sense of community that I've experienced."

Clergy who provide space for AA or NA meetings in their parish basements have told the priest, "I wish we could get what the people have downstairs in our people upstairs."

The priest sees the similarities between AA meetings and liturgies. "Think about the celebration of the Eucharist. You come together, you break open the word, you're fed at the table and you go out to live your life. If you come to an AA meeting, there's something broken open, people are spiritually fed and then they go out to live their lives. It's an incredibly powerful form of community."

'Ashley saved my life'

"Father Martin's Ashley saved my life," Bob M., a Catholic-school graduate who lives in Wilmington, told *The Dialog* recently. "Father Mark is doing a great job down there." Bob —



Courtesy Father Martin's Ashley

Father Martin's Ashley sits on 43 acres on the Chesapeake Bay. The campus includes a chapel (above).

whose last name is being withheld to protect his privacy — said he entered the facility "morally bankrupt" in 1995 and "I have been sober ever since. It's truly a gift from God."

As for the community of recovering addicts, Bob said Alcoholics Anonymous has a commitment that "we want the hand of AA to be there when people reach out for help. As we say, 'to keep it, we have to give it away.'"

Dee Christensen, director of alumni services at Ashley, was a patient there 12 years ago. On staff now for seven years, Christensen said Ashley taught her "how to live again without the use of drugs and alcohol. When I was here as a patient it's the first time I had hope in my life to be who God really wanted me to be."

Christensen, a member of St.



Agnes Parish in Catonsville, Md., said she's pleased Father Hushen is "following in the footsteps of Father Martin in the way our philosophy and mission statement is based on love and treats patients with dignity and respect to give them hope that they can get well."

Recalling a recent Mass at the chapel, Christensen said Father Hushen welcomed a Jewish patient to the service. "Father Mark is great with people of all denominations. I know we're in good hands with Father Mark. It's like he was sent to us."

Stigma remains

Despite increased public awareness about addiction and programs, Father Hushen said the stigma of addiction continues.

An addict's relapse is regarded as a failure, he said, but people with congestive heart disease aren't told, "treatment didn't work, you're a failure." They get more treatment.

"One of the beautiful things of Father Martin's treatment" is that it stresses the "innate dignity" of people and the care all people deserve, he said. "So everything at Ashley is geared to that, from

the very setting to everything we do in the treatment program. At Ashley our sole purpose is to heal."

In addition to its 28-day program, Ashley provides its alumni with monthly programs and off-campus workshops. There's also a rehab program for relapsed patients.

'Front-line stuff' for clergy

While the Catholic Church provides help for alcoholics through Catholic Charities and pastoral programs, Father Hushen said, "I would say by and large the clergy is not educated [about addictions] and the unfortunate thing is that often what they're dealing with [in counseling situations] is a direct result of drug and alcohol problems, untreated alcoholism, untreated codependency."

Those conditions show up in parish work — failed marriages, domestic violence, health problems. "It's front-line stuff for clergy, and they don't have the knowledge or background to be able to identify what's the underlying cause of all this. ... It's almost pastoral malpractice if you're a minister and you don't know anything about addiction."

For more information on Father Martin's Ashley call (800) 799-4673 or visit www.fathermartinsashley.org.

For information on Alcoholics Anonymous visit www.aa.org and for Narcotics Anonymous, www.na.org.