

What is Substance Addiction Ministry (SAM)?

People afflicted with or affected by addiction are suffering with a spiritual malady. Addiction disconnects people: from self, loved ones, and God. SAM's mission is to help these people re-connect: with self, loved ones, and God. For everyone who is afflicted with an addiction, a minimum of four other people will be affected. SAM is a quality of life ministry. Many of us deny the presence of the problem or the magnitude of addiction's affects. SAM is a support ministry that helps people face the challenges that accompany addiction.

It is important to mention that SAM was initiated by Erik A. Vagenius, MHS, CAP as a result of an appointment by the Diocese of Palm Beach, FL – to develop a program designed to facilitate hope, healing and reconciliation to people touched by addiction. The creation of SAM was a direct response to the 1992 pastoral letter of the American Bishops entitled Communities of Hope: Parishes and Substance Abuse.

SAM teams' mission is to:

- Pray, and invite others to pray that those suffering from addiction and their families find the road to recovery, and for those who have lost loved ones to addiction;
- Increase awareness of addiction through education to various ministries and groups within the parish family and the community at large; and
- Provide a safe, confidential place for parishioners to call for help and receive appropriate referral and support.

How do I get started?

Establishing SAM is very simple. The first step is to enlist leadership support to present an overview of SAM at your parish. Secondly, volunteers are enlisted to form a core group to enter a course of training and formation to initiate SAM at the parish level. Team members do not have to be in recovery but will need to meet specific recovery requirements as well as the general membership qualities, which are set forth below:

- A. Be a caring person.
- B. Have emotional stability, i.e., not seeking membership to solve personal problems.
- C. If in recovery:
 - i. Have a minimum of one-year continuous, uninterrupted sobriety.
 - ii. Attend AA or NA meetings regularly.
 - iii. Have a sponsor.
 - iv. Attend open Alanon meetings.
- D. If affected by, or living with, a person with active addiction:
 - i. Have a minimum of one-year in Alanon, ACOA, CODA, or Alateen.
 - ii. Attend Alanon, ACOA, CODA, Alateen meetings regularly.
 - iii. Have a sponsor.

- iv. Attend open AA or NA meetings.
- E. If not in recovery, have a working knowledge of AA, NA, Alanon, Alateen, ACOA, and attend open meetings of these recovery fellowships.
 - i. Be willing to accept two-year commitment to SAM.
 - ii. Be willing and able to attend team meetings and functions, and assume responsibilities for team projects.
- F. Maintain strictest confidentiality in accord with existing laws and ethical codes.
- G. Attend ongoing continuing educational training sessions, as required.
- H. Minister to team members, as needed.
- I. THE PASTOR WILL HAVE FINAL APPROVAL OF ALL SAM TEAM MEMBERS.

An initial training session for core team members will have an agenda similar to the following:

- Opening Prayer
- Introductions
- History of SAM (nationally and locally)
- Encountering Christ through Service – a model for preparation and reflection on parish social ministry based on the Magi of Matthew's Gospel
- The threefold ministry of SAM – Prayer, Presentations and Personal Presence, including examples of each
- SAM ministry team composition, expectations and requirements
- Q & A
- Next steps
- Closing Prayer

The final (optional) step is a Commissioning Ceremony which takes place at a weekend Mass, with the SAM team being introduced to their fellow parishioners. Throughout the course of training and implementation of SAM is the reinforcement of the strict need for confidentiality between team members and those seeking help. Without this, no trust could exist