

ng families renews church

off and on, and has received special counseling to deal with issues of abuse and incest. She has completed her high-school equivalency degree, and is beginning college.

Her oldest child has been in group therapy, and both older children attend Alatot. The whole family has been struggling against terrible odds to build and rebuild their lives.

At Christmas, I received a letter from Abby. "Thank you for caring so much for me and my family," she wrote.

We all need to know we are cared about, not just cared for, that we have a personal connection to a good, loving community that will last over time. Theresa Friendship Center is such a community, based and centered on our faith in Christ. We meet our people where they are, and listen prayerfully to their needs. Aside from monetary poverty, the major issue we confront is addiction.

'The prettiest (flowers) were those folks who were good to me, and the weeds and briars were those folks who hurt me. I would pick the pretty flowers (and) ... I would feel so good and warm inside. I felt a little of that in the church.'

Our experience has taught us that this disease is a major symptom of the alienation that afflicts our community at large. We live in a society constantly torn by the pain of alienation, which breeds multiple forms of poverty.

Christian ministries such as ours take seriously the immensity of these problems — alienation, marginalization and poverty — that speak of a far deeper problem invading society as a whole, our turning away from God as our center.

Conversely, spiritual awakening and a process of ongoing spiritual growth are essential elements to the process of recovery. The spirituality of recovery is directed against the

dynamics of the loss of self that causes humans to hold themselves in inner contempt — a contempt that is, in turn, projected outward onto others.

Abby, for instance, was born into an addictive family. Month after month, year after year, she received the message that there was something inherently wrong with her. Emotional, physical and sexual abuse filled her life. Then came heavy drug addiction, which broke down whatever core of authentic life Abby may have had. The end result of this process is the cessation of psychological life, a living death, hell.

The journey back from such an addiction is highly personal, as well as richly communal — an experience of personal and shared-group conversion. Similar to liberation theology, it is the struggle against all the forces of death wherever they are manifest.

As did liberation theology, the spirituality of recovery has given rise to a powerful grass-roots movement among the afflicted, which is directed at transformation of personality. The fact that this movement has taken hold outside organized religion should pose a challenge to us in ministry — a challenge that can revitalize our communities and move us to creative new models that respond to the needs of our society.

At Theresa Center, we have been privileged to witness the transforming presence of Christ in the midst of the suffering and distortion brought upon us by addiction. The power of Jesus' passion and death can be seen in the recovery process — a journey from living death during which the the spiritual and mental state of self-negation is destroyed. Christ breaks open the powers of darkness and exposes the truth. Denial and deception can reign no longer.

In Abby's case, the early stages of this work were done during her year at the rehab center. But that was only the tip of the iceberg. Uncovering one's inner pain and brokenness, and rebuilding on a firm foundation is an immense process. As a church community, we can do much to directly help in that process.

First, we can familiarize ourselves with the nature of the disease, and discern a role that complements the work of specialists from the social, medical, and mental-health agencies.

At Theresa Friendship Center, our focus has always been friendship. We are a safe place, a type of surrogate family that offers simple, holistic programming. At the same time, we are quick to refer people to other programs for appropriate care when needed. **Continued on page 15**

Insight

