

St. Margaret, Bel Air, aiding in the road to recovery

Michael Jacoby stood in a Baltimore County courtroom on the day of his June 2008 sentencing and asked for forgiveness.

Jeff Vetter walked in that day hating Jacoby, whose mistake had taken the life of Vetter's daughter, Jessica, the year before. Driving drunk, Jacoby struck the motorcycle Jessica was a passenger on during that fateful April encounter.

Vetter choked back emotion June 23 as he stood at the lectern of St. Margaret in Bel Air. The grieving father told attendees at an ecumenical service for addiction recovery that he had a moment of transformation watching Jacoby in the courtroom. He felt sorry for the then-24-year-old Jacoby, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

"That kid is going away with all these hard criminals," Vetter remembered telling his wife afterward. "What good does that do? He went out - had a few too many drinks on an empty stomach. He made a wrong choice."

Vetter was able to give Jacoby the gift of forgiveness and lobbied a judge to convert Jacoby's sentence into something beneficial for the community. The two speak at gatherings in the area, including at the recent St. Margaret recovery prayer service.

Leading the event was Father Jesse Bolger, associate pastor of St. Margaret. Joining him were Harford County pastors of other churches, including Carol Vanessa of Word of Faith International Outreach, Alex Lozada of Mountain Christian Church and Tom Lantieri of Harford Christian Church.

Each of the pastors present spoke during the June 23 service, with Father Bolger encouraging those in attendance to reach out for God's forgiveness.

"We need his forgiveness," Father Bolger said. "We need to forgive as well."

Many of the more than 100 people in attendance had been affected by substance

addition in some fashion, according to organizers.

“Today we gather praying for an end to this scourge of addiction that afflicts our county and our city,” Father Bolger said. “We know that in the program of recovery, it’s a two-way street like any other relationship.”

St. Margaret started an active substance abuse ministry in 2007 after a parish-wide survey. It uses a faith-filled approach to educate, support and advocate the needs of those impacted by addictions.

Patrick McCracken, a member of the St. Margaret’s substance abuse ministry leadership team, said: “We’re building bridges everywhere we can.”

A group of Harford County churches works with local governments to increase the faith presence in addiction recovery.

St. Margaret parishioner Joe Ryan, who heads Harford County’s office of drug control, said such religious outreach is vital in helping those who need treatment.

“Government alone will never solve the problem,” Ryan said. “If we help one person tonight, it was worth all the effort.”