

Florida Pastor Turned Family Grief Into Ministry Opportunity

The death of his son in a DUI accident led David Mallory to double his efforts to reach alcoholics

When a drunken driver slammed into a group of teens standing alongside a central Florida highway after their church bus broke down, David Mallory experienced one of the darkest days of his life.

His 16-year-old son, Joshua, along with three other teens and a chaperone from his church, was killed in the collision, leaving Mallory to question his life's work.

Pastor of First Assembly of God in Naples, Fla., Mallory wondered whether or not his son would be alive if not for his two ministries—a bus ministry for children and an outreach to drug addicts and alcoholics. “It was as though a voice said to me: ‘You fool. If it weren’t for the combination of the two ministries, Joshua would still be alive,’” Mallory said.

But Mallory said he shook the voice from his head by remembering what he and his wife, Becky, did when they got married. On their knees, the couple dedicated their lives to the glory of God. Mallory said the lyrics to “I Surrender All” came to mind, and he realized God was asking him if he meant those words when he sang them at his wedding.

So instead of being hardened by the irony in his son's death, Mallory increased his efforts to reach addicts with the forgiving, healing power of Jesus Christ.

A decade later, he is building a \$100 million, 70-acre community in east Naples dedicated to helping rehabilitate people with drug and alcohol addictions. The facility will have 1,100 beds for addicts, the homeless and unwed mothers, and another 600 apartments for retired ministers and missionaries.

Developing a ministry to addicts has not come without a struggle. Mallory has had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to comply with federal wetland permits. He's spent thousands of dollars to meet county zoning and development codes. And the church must repay \$1.2 million they received from a man later convicted of swindling investors out of millions.

But Mallory is convinced of the importance of the Campus of Care, which currently can house up to 40 recovering addicts in modular homes. He knows God can change lives; he sees success stories every day.

Antony Diehl, 40, drank so much he was on the verge of death before turning to the campus for help. "Now I feel whole," Diehl said, adding that he wants to become a missionary when he completes the program. "So I can go on and help others."

Literally hundreds of testimonies have emerged from Mallory's work. By the time the buildings are completed, the facility will house the Life Academy, a live-in drug and alcohol rehabilitation program; Neighborhood House, a homeless shelter; Alpha House for those in transition; and MUM's, the Ministry to Unwed Mothers.

The ministry's effectiveness has caught the attention of people in high places. Local judges often offer convicted drug and alcohol offenders the option of going to jail or to Mallory's Campus of Care. There is a waiting list for the recovery program, which has an 80 percent success rate for those who complete it. But Mallory needs millions of dollars more to bring the vision into full fruition.

"There are so many that desperately need the programs offered, we [need financial partners] to make the completed facility a reality," he said.

The man convicted of killing Joshua and the four others is serving five life sentences and has become a Christian since the incident, Mallory said. He wrote Mallory and his wife a letter, saying that when he gets to heaven he will thank Joshua. Had he died that night, the man wrote, he would have spent eternity separated from God.

Mallory wonders aloud about the value people place on restoring works of art. His restoration work is on people. "These are lives," he said. "The greatest work of art is a man's soul."

Denise Zoldan in Naples, Fla.