

Former USA Today Columnist Helps Addicted Women

Former USA Today columnist Barbara Reynolds is showing women how to break free of drug and alcohol dependency

At one time in her life, Barbara Reynolds spent her days writing newspaper columns that shouted her outrage about national and world affairs to millions of people. Part of the founding editorial team for USA Today, she once found herself in the enviable position of opining on three major TV news shows in one day. It was what she lived for. Then.

Today, the Rev. Barbara Reynolds is working outside the media limelight. Her main platform is a pulpit at the Greater Mount Calvary Holy Church in Washington, D.C., which is affiliated with the historic Pentecostal denomination Mount Calvary Holy Churches of America.

She is spreading the gospel with fresh fervor to a more targeted audience. Her mission is to help women who are living desperately because of drug, alcohol and cigarette addictions.

She knows personally about the firm grip that alcohol can have on a person's life. Reynolds said that for many of her years as a prominent journalist she was a weekend drinker who hid her problem from others. "People didn't know what a slippery slope I was on," she recalled in a recent interview.

She accepted Christ in the late 1970s at a storefront church in Chicago. "A cool alpine wind blew through my body, just like the way Jesus described the born-again experience to

Nicodemus," she says today.

Spurred on by the 1984 adoption of her son, now 22, Reynolds said she asked God to release her from her cravings. He did, placing in her a hunger to help other women find freedom in Christ through a ministry she founded in 1996 called Harriet's Children, named after the abolitionist Harriet Tubman, who helped liberate African Americans from slavery.

Reynolds will soon open a healing center in the Washington suburbs for women with addictions. She is also designing a seven-week program focused on spiritual makeovers to show people how they can change from the inside out.

On a warm night recently, Reynolds stood in the chapel at Greater Mount Calvary, looking regal in a dark suit accented with a brightly colored stole. "I just want to set the tone," she told those who had gathered at the monthly "Friday Night 'Get Right' Service."

"You have entered the supernatural," she told the crowd. "I believe in miracles. I believe something good is going to happen tonight, something awesome."

Reynolds has experienced miracles. When she looked over the mostly female audience, she saw women who had given up addictions and accepted Christ. Many of them then joined in the work of Harriet's Children.

When she glanced over at the young minister waiting to preach the evening's sermon, Maria Terry, 32, Reynolds recognized the hand of God at work. Three years ago, Terry suffered a paralyzing stroke and short-term memory loss. "She came out of

this [ordeal] a preacher," Reynolds said about the young woman she calls a goddaughter.

At the service was another young woman, Millicent Barnes, wearing her security guard uniform and with two active youngsters in tow. "I rededicated my life to Christ this year," Barnes said after the service. "Harriet's Children has adopted my family because they know what I'm going through. It has been helping me keep my focus away from drugs and alcohol."

Bishop Alfred A. Owens Jr., the pastor of Greater Mount Calvary, said Reynolds is a blessing to the ministry of his inner-city church. "I have literally seen the lives of hundreds of women changed. Over the years, she has done so much. And it's not just the ones she ministers to on Friday nights."

Owens ordained Reynolds in 1995. She is an elder on the church's evangelistic board and is on the faculty of its Calvary Bible Institute. She earned her master's degree in religious studies from Howard University School of Divinity in 1991 and her doctor of ministry degree from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, in 1998.

At 61, Reynolds is a woman transformed. She said she is experiencing more every day the power of God's forgiveness and grace. She has overcome—not so graciously she said—her very public firing from USA Today eight years ago. Her strong political views and her insistence on writing about religion fueled her ouster, she said. "I was one step away from throwing away everything I had learned in seminary."

After the firing, she considered drinking again and moving to Europe, until Owens stopped her and reminded her of the ministry she had begun.

More recently, she has begun a process of reconciling with the mother from whom she has been estranged for 58 years. "Through forgiveness, my whole life changed toward her," Reynolds said, "and I began to thank her for bringing me into this world." In 2002, she shared Thanksgiving with her mother, her brother from whom she was also estranged and a niece she had not met before.

Reynolds now hosts an hour-long Saturday satellite radio show and often lectures on college campuses. Next spring she expects to release her fourth book, an autobiography titled *Out of Hell and Living Well*.

"I feel a great need to pass on what I have learned [about] how to survive, how to grow," she said. Her desire is to do as Harriet Tubman did years ago when she risked her life to help slaves escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad. Reynolds said she and about 35 women ministers, along with other participants in Harriet's Children are "snatching from the hands of the enemy" women enslaved by addictions and offering them healing through Christ.

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