

‘Giant of a Man’: Celebrate Recovery Announces Death of Co-Founder John Baker

Pastor John Baker, co-founder with his wife, Cheryl, of faith-based addiction recovery movement Celebrate Recovery, has died. The ministry, born in 1991 at megachurch Saddleback in Southern California and dedicated to helping people deal with “hurts, hangups and habits,” announced his Feb. 23 death on Facebook. Celebrate Recovery National Director Mac Owen wrote, “John touched more people with the healing power and grace of Jesus Christ than anyone else that I have ever known personally and one of those lives was mine.”

There are times in life when words are totally inadequate in sharing how you feel, this morning is one of those days. My...

Posted by Celebrate Recovery on Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Celebrate Recovery had the proverbial humble beginning back in the era when Saddleback was meeting in a high school gymnasium. The ministry was “born out of Baker’s personal struggles. He started drinking in college and by his 30s was a functional alcoholic. In his 40s, he joined an Alcoholics Anonymous group meeting at Saddleback, according to a 2009 profile of Baker in the *Tulsa World*,” per RNS. Baker sent Pastor Rick Warren a 13-page, single-spaced letter outlining the vision God had given him for the ministry, per the ministry’s website.

“Great John—go do it!” Warren told him.

Today, Celebrate Recovery has more than 35,000 churches around the world that offer the program, a number that continues to grow, and is also growing in rescue missions, universities,

recovery houses and prisons across the globe. The ministry reports that more than 5 million individuals have completed its Step study.

Kay Warren posted her own tribute to Baker on Twitter, describing how God worked a change in Baker's life that ended up transforming the lives of "more than 7 million men and women around the world" as well:

1/3 Our world lost a giant of a man today, and our family lost a dear friend and brother in the Lord. Thirty years ago John Baker turned the ruins of his life over to Jesus Christ and God transformed him from a driven businessman with an addiction to alcohol, a failing marriage,

– Kay Warren (@KayWarren1) February 24, 2021

She concluded, "There is simply no way to put into words how I love John and will miss this kind, creative, brilliant and faithful man."

Celebrate Recovery shared another post, reminding readers of Baker's words at the close of the 2020 Celebrate Recovery Summit: "He encouraged us to put our future in God's hands, and reminded us that God will always have us covered."