

Speaker 1:

Today we're with the executive director Yvonne Banks of Christian Counseling Ministries of Western New York, who in one sense is taking on this as a new position, but in another sense has over 30 years of ministry experience in this area. Christian Counseling Ministries exists to provide professional counseling that integrates biblical principles to guide a person through their journey of healing their wounds from their past, resolving conflicts in the present, and basically achieving the fullness of life that God has called us all to.

I'm going to throw a couple things out here. Master's degree in multidisciplinary human services with a concentration in non-profit leadership. She's New York State credentialed as a counselor in alcoholism and substance abuse. She's a master counselor and certified in trauma counseling. Basically, as I mentioned earlier, over 30 years of experience in addiction or working with those struggling with mental health issues. So Yvonne, thank you very much for coming in, spending some time with us. So let me jump right in and ask why would anyone want to go to a counselor?

Yvonne Banks:

Well, people go to counselors for various reasons being that they could potentially have a psychological, physical condition that they have altered brain chemistry and they need many times medication to help manage the physical component, but then they also need the counseling support on how to actually work through life conditions. Then there's another group of people who would come to counseling who are just struggling one way or another, and they could be dealing with anxiety, they could be dealing with depression, they could be dealing with children who are struggling themselves with a condition and they just need somebody to help them seek the clarity that they need.

Many times, people come to counseling because they themselves have very deep wounds from their childhood or their adult experiences that they have lived through. What that's done is it's changed how they handle their world today. So when we talk about counseling for healing wounds of the past and then talking about the issues of today, how is that affecting your decision making or how you're living your life today and then how do you then move forward in a new way in learning to walk through for the future.

Speaker 1:

How would you suggest a person evaluates their decision on, I'll just work it out with my husband or my wife or my friend in comparison to, you know what, maybe I should go see a professional?

Yvonne Banks:

Many times we have patterns in our life that we can look back if we just evaluate. A lot of times there's consequences that we pay based on our decisions, right? For example, if I start drinking and I just go out and have a couple drinks and there's no consequences to that, I'm not fighting with a spouse or family members or getting in trouble with my parents, is that a problem? Well, maybe not. But it is a problem if all of a sudden I create fights, arguments, set up scenarios to justify me to go drink or use substances, now there's a problem and soon I have no control over that anymore. It's now that substance controlling me.

Speaker 1:

So the uniqueness of Christian Counseling Ministries is that they apply biblical principles. So when you're talking about alcohol or substance abuse, most people would probably think, "Well, if you're a Christian,

you're not doing those things." But they're getting caught, Christians are getting caught in those vices, those hurts as well. Now they need a place to go. What do they do? How are they recognizing, "Hey, I should start talking to somebody about this"?

Yvonne Banks:

Yeah. Because you begin to experience consequences in your life. So I want to shift it off of the addiction piece right now, and I really want to do shift it towards the mental health piece. I'm going to tie you those two things together because there's a great question, which came first, the chicken or the egg? Did I have the mental health condition first and then I began using substances to manage my mental health condition? So at Christian Counseling Ministries, we're not focused on addiction, even though that is my experience, we're focused more on the mental health component and helping people manage those conditions. We have a large number of people coming in, especially coming off of COVID, anxiety and depression, these past couple years have really put on stressors on families and individuals that they otherwise may not have had in the past.

Speaker 1:

I'm not sure people even recognize that the time that they spent confined or in COVID scare, that that's actually affected them.

Yvonne Banks:

Yeah, it's traumatizing actually, right? But you think about social isolation, and that could be from the kids not being able to socialize with their friends in school, that was so big. Now they're having online school and now they're getting put back into the schools and now there's behavioral issues, bullying. It's almost like having to find your place in the school again. So all of those issues that children had to deal with prior are now exacerbated or made greater because everybody is kind of trying to get their own position within that social group of people. So children are really struggling in school, and then parents are having to deal with depressed kids, anxious kids, not wanting to go to school anymore or seeing signs and symptoms of their children.

Speaker 1:

So that's a big effort right now that that CCM is dealing with.

Yvonne Banks:

Yes, very much so.

Speaker 1:

So how do you integrate the counseling side with the biblical side?

Yvonne Banks:

It's so wonderful because that's what makes Christian Counseling Ministries of Western New York very unique. We look at it to say we have licensed professionals, but we're all Christians who work there. We all are connected in a body of Christ with accountabilities. We all are in the word, small groups, learning the Bible. Then what we do, we know there's hope in Jesus Christ, right? That is where sometimes we can't change our circumstances, but he's our hope and calling on him all the time and the power of prayer and the power of prayer within a family and what does that look like.

So it gives me great joy to be able to counsel somebody, but then to be able to say, "Can I pray with you?" Or I can use a biblical story because we know there's nothing new under the sun, right? So everything we're dealing with today, we can find something in the Bible that can equally equate to the circumstance no matter how great or how small it is today. So when I say to you, 46% of adults may need some type of counseling in their lifetime, okay? So that's professional counseling I'm talking about.

So when you look at everybody else who are involved in the church, biblical counseling is extremely helpful and beneficial for people who are not experiencing something that's so great and overwhelming to them that they're having a difficult living today's life, in the here and now. For example, if I have a medical condition and I live with chronic pain every single day, and you can go for biblical counseling, and we know about healing in the Bible, we know about many examples in the Bible of people living with physical disorders through a lifetime, right? There's many examples in the Bible and how do you do that just relying on what the Bible tells you.

Then there's professional licensed counseling. These are individuals like we have at CCM where they've been trained in fields of study and proven research techniques in saying what works and what doesn't work from a much more scientific approach. See, I'm a firm believer, and what do we talk about, mind, body, spirit, right? So when we're talking about the body, a lot of these approaches that our trained professionals have are the physical body themselves. They've watched brain scans, they've done the research with people to see what works and what doesn't work. They have all the resources to say in our flesh, because we live in flesh, in our flesh, if you do this, then this should happen. So somebody dealing with pain management, there's a lot of different proven research, proven techniques on ways that can help somebody.

Speaker 1:

A chemical imbalance that they would not understand.

Yvonne Banks:

Correct.

Speaker 1:

You're able to guide them maybe towards the right medication or the understanding of their body, whereas biblical counseling would be-

Yvonne Banks:

Spirit, right? Spirit and mind and work on your mind because the Bible talks about that, right? Your mind, your spirit. But when you're talking professional counseling, these are trained professionals in different fields of study that is research proven with techniques. So when you come to us, we can incorporate both together as well.

Speaker 1:

By my own experience, I know several people who through a professional Christian counselor didn't realize that within their body they had a slight chemical imbalance, whatever that is, that's not my field. But the doctor diagnosed them with this slight chemical imbalance, provided for them a limited amount of medication, changed their life completely just by, I hate to say, just by a small pill, but a medicine that actually could help bring their stress down, bring their anxiety down a little bit, and gave them a new life from their own words. I'm thinking that's the same type of application that you guys do.

Yvonne Banks:

Yeah, most people would probably be very surprised at the number of people who they're friends with or go to church who are on some type of medication management for the physical chemical imbalances within their bodies. Now, there's natural ways that you can go about that. Again, being trained in certain things, you can say, "Okay, well potentially this is through natural remedies," or sometimes even just us saying, "Well, you don't need to go see a psychiatrist. Why don't you have this discussion with your primary medical doctor first because they actually can also prescribe mild medications for people to help them."

Speaker 1:

Non-addictive.

Yvonne Banks:

Yes, to help them through that and now it's managed right through people's primary medical doctor, not even through a psychiatrist depending on the level of condition that they have. So a lot of people are opposed to medications. However, God uses so many different ways to help people to live this full life and creative life and purposeful life. Why would we want to deny somebody the ability to live that way?

Speaker 1:

Would you have any kind of a success story that, as an example, for an average person who is, they're working through a stress, so I just need to spend more time with my kids. That's what I understand I need to do. Well, I shouldn't be that angry. I'll just work on this. What would be something like that for a common person to realize, "Hey, maybe I should be talking to a professional about this"?

Yvonne Banks:

That's where you look at what is the negativity in your home. If there is a lot of tension and stress within the house itself or even within inside your own self that you're not able to get beyond just to a positive place. Every day is negative. We choose joy and that what the Lord says, "We have joy in our heart and our spirit," and we choose that, but sometimes you can't get past that. To me, that would be evaluate, do a quick evaluation of your own life and say, "Am I content in my life today?" We all know that circumstances of life can come and go, but do I have any joy in my spirit? Do I have any satisfaction or fullness in my heart in a positive manner?

If you can look at it and say the negative outweighs the positive, then you may just need to go to talk to somebody about that and sort through those muddy waters right now and then develop a very solution focused. That's one thing we do. We're not looking to engage people for counseling forever. I come from the world that discharge planning starts at the moment you engage with services, right? The goal is for you to be equipped on your own as quick as possible. So when we're looking at it very person-centered, what are the specific issues you're dealing with today? Marriage, you asked for success. I mean, we provide marriage and couples counseling, which is wonderful. It's wonderful to see restored marriages moving forward where they need that more licensed, trained, specific counseling.

We use some proven techniques for marriage counseling, sometimes understanding who is your spouse, how do you communicate with your spouse, do you work together or are you pulling apart all the time, how do you raise children together? Sometimes it's the whole family unit comes in, parents with the children as well, because sometimes children are really good at pitting their parents one against the

other, right? It's about how do you create that unified front even if you don't agree a hundred percent. But what does that look like then in a family unit to see a family unit be able to come together as well?

Speaker 1:

I'm going to read something from your website. It said sometimes the burden is too much to carry or understand on our own. We need each other. When our body hurts, we see medical doctors. When our mind, emotions or spirit hurts, therapists are here to aid in the healing process. There is no shame in needing help. I was thinking about that as after I had read it from your website and realized that I think people sometimes have that not me, can't be me, I'll deal with it. What they end up doing is struggling with it for so long until it affects them, affects their relationships, affects their future, might affect their job. Yet, if they're willing to reach out, if they're willing to spend a few hours or sessions with a professional who is also of the like-minded biblical based thinking, you're able to help.

Yvonne Banks:

Yes, absolutely. One of the things that we do that I think, especially from a church perspective, is the counseling that we provide, even for health and wholeness for the pastors. We provide a real safe, confidential space for pastors to come because you want your pastor to be as healthy as possible as well. Think about that. Pastors are give, give, give right? They're responsible. They carry that burden for all of the people in their churches and it's exhausting and it's mentally exhausting, emotionally exhausting the stress that they carry. So even for pastors to say, "You're welcome to come," we have the shame, guilt is I did something bad, shame is I am bad. So when you carry that, those feelings and thoughts like you talked about to long-

Speaker 1:

Would that be I am bad, I have failed?

Yvonne Banks:

I'm flawed. I failed. It's not like, "Oh, I made the wrong decision. I'm going to learn from it and I'm going to grow. No, I'm a failure. I'm flawed personally." Sometimes that can be put on us from other people outside of us who speak... We talk our tongue what, speaks life or death, right? So sometimes when people are around environments or been in those environments where you have enough death spoken into you through the course of your life, so to speak, through negativity, you're not good, you're bad, you believe you are the flawed person. So you carry that with you and then it carries into families as well.

One other thing I just want to mention that I found now so valuable is what we're doing for businesses as well. Many times businesses, especially if there's Christian owners of the business or Christian workers within the business, at my prior employer, we had an event where people had died and it really took a toll on the employees. We actually had one of the counselors from Christian Counseling Ministries come in to be available for those staff who were really struggling with that one circumstance at that moment in time to help get them along. So we do that for businesses who maybe have just some internal conflicts among their staff as well for support.

There's enough businesses where an accident can happen and people are traumatized by maybe seeing an accident. Then we also have one business who said, "We're Christians and we love our employees, and even though we have our benefit package of health insurance, EAP and counseling services, we

want the biblical component in there." So they actually offer that also to their employees at their own expense above and beyond.

Speaker 1:

So you're just not narrow to the Christian, you're broad to anybody who's willing to step in through your doors.

Yvonne Banks:

Absolutely.

Speaker 1:

I mean, I would imagine that a person who doesn't believe in Christ is thinking, "Oh my gosh, the first thing they're going to do is hit me with the Bible and I've got some concerns and issues. I don't want to hear that first." How does that work out?

Yvonne Banks:

So we don't force it on anybody. If we're counseling somebody who says, "I really don't want the Bible as to be mentioned or to be brought into the counseling session," then we respect that person. Remember, everybody also is following their own code of ethics according to the license that they hold and that's very important. You service the person in front of you. But the one thing that I know about the word of God is we as all Christians, you can speak the word of God into people, and it is the word of God, but they don't even know it's the word of God because it's life.

Speaker 1:

You're living it.

Yvonne Banks:

Right. So you're speaking life into people and they're healing, and it's because of the life of the word being spoken into them as well, right? That's how we are to be with one another. Our tagline is compassionate care. We provide compassionate care through your healing journey. So that compassion that we know, we try to bring the compassion of Christ into the session, whether you're a believer or you're non-believer. We also have non-believers who bring their children to us.

Because of the society that we live in today and so many of those external stressors that are being put on them, they're looking at it saying, "Okay, I've taken them to secular counseling, just secular counseling. It didn't work. But if I'm going to look at the two, I at least know some Christian principles. So I'd much rather have my children at least get some basic Christian principles." But they may say, "We don't want you talking the Bible to them."

Speaker 1:

Sure.

Yvonne Banks:

So again, we're going to-

Speaker 1:

They want the values, they want the morals.

Yvonne Banks:

Yes, absolutely.

Speaker 1:

The ethics that are supposedly in place to some extent, even in their own life, not realizing where they actually come from.

Yvonne Banks:

Exactly, the character and integrity that Christians should be bringing to the table with them as they live their life out, and in our case, in our counseling sessions as well, and instilling all those values and beliefs of moral code that you may not find out in the world today.

Speaker 1:

Well, I'm excited that Christian Counseling Ministry is there, that they're available to people, that they're available to anyone who is looking to have a listening ear with either biblical principles that we're talking about, or at least someone who has those same values to help them through some of their hurting stages. What would be the website that a person can go to?

Yvonne Banks:

Ccmwny.org. What's really nice, and you can actually go on the website, you can click on any one of the squares, and it will show the different areas that we focus in on, that you can see the services we offer. Also, if you go to our team, you can click on any one of the staff pictures and their bio is going to come up, and so you can really see what the staff team is as well.

Speaker 1:

Great. Well, thank you, Yvonne. That's a lot to think through. There's a lot more that I'm sure you could share with us, but we really appreciate you spending this time with us today.

Yvonne Banks:

Oh, thank you. I'll just ask for prayer. We're getting ready to launch a satellite site in Hamburg.

Speaker 1:

Good.

Yvonne Banks:

So our satellite office will be at Revive Wesleyan Church on McKinley Parkway in Hamburg. They're very excited, but that's going to be open to all the South Towns community and what makes that location nice also, because we get calls from Gowanda and Springville area, and to be able to have a location that's closer for people to come up and receive licensed counseling with those biblical truths, you just don't find that. So we're very excited.

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Speaker 1:

So a new location?

Yvonne Banks:

New location. Also really just prayer and compassion for the hearts of people, and especially within churches, that they also work with people and deal with people with compassion and let people know it's okay, even if it's just somebody you see in the church to say that they just look down or they're struggling and to de-stigmatize seeking mental health services. But just to say at least go, it doesn't have to be a lifetime, but it could maybe help you out of the rut that you're in right now.

Speaker 1:

Again, the website is?

Yvonne Banks:

Ccmwny.org.

Speaker 1:

Great. Great. Thanks for being with us today.

Yvonne Banks:

Oh, thank you so much for having me.