Hobart church invites all to meetings as it prepares to bring trauma outreach program to NWI

Sarah Reese sarah.reese@nwi.com, 219-933-3351

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The Rev. Charles Strietelmeier, pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church in Hobart

HOBART — A local church is working to bring a successful trauma outreach program to the Region to help those affected by destructive forces such as crime, poverty and racism find healing.

The Rev. Charles Strietelmeier, of Augustana Lutheran Church in Hobart, visited Roxbury Presbyterian Church in Boston last year to learn more about the Cory Johnson Program. The program currently is being studied by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a possible model, Strietelmeier said.

Leaders from the Cory Johnson Program are set to visit Hobart and Gary in early June to show how Northwest Indiana residents could replicate their efforts, Strietelmeier said. "I'm really excited about what this can do, because I think trauma lies at the heart of our urban distress," he said. Trauma can lead to emotional volatility, social isolation, self-medicating behavior and a cycle of repeated trauma, he said. Group-based therapy is available in Northwest Indiana, but this would be the first community-based trauma outreach program.

Anyone interested in participating or partnering with the nonprofit working to bring the program to the Region may attend one of two identical meetings.

The first meeting is set for 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. June 4 at Trinity United Church of Christ, 1275 W. 20th Ave, Gary.
The second is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. June 5 at Augustana Lutheran Church, 207 N. Kelly St. in Hobart.

The informational meetings are free, but RSVPs are requested for meal planning. Call 219-942-3574 or email augustanahobart@gmail.com.

Once a month, people will be invited to have dinner, talk, form friendships and tell stories about how they've been hurt, Strietelmeier said.

"From a trauma-healing standpoint, this works for several reasons," he said. "It moves traumatic memories into narrative, verbal memories. It breaks down isolation and provides validations for the experience."

Participants will be asked to keep all conversations confidential and refrain from interrupting, commenting or making suggestions about what speakers should do. Listeners can provide emotional support.

Spirituality is important, but participants will not be told how to worship, he said. "We will not attempt to convert anyone, and we will deal with whatever people bring to it," he said.

The program is not intended to replace therapy but could offer an option to those who cannot afford counseling or don't have insurance, Strietelmeier said.

"These meetings are intended for absolutely anybody who wants to come," he said. "We will have some professionals come, but we also want folks who have been hurt to come and see if this is something they'd like to participate in."