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Counselor uses method in which faith is foundational

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If you had the opportunity to go to counseling, and knew that Christ would be in the room with you, would you do it?

Dr. Francis Hymel of New Hope Pastoral Counseling said he integrates "strong, Christian spirituality with psychology" in a way that provides genuine healing to a person's internal suffering."

Having practiced psychology since 1988, he said he is amazed by the results produced by spiritual intervention.

Hymel's approach, founded by Dr. Ed Smith, is called TheoPhostic Counseling (TheoPhostic is Greek for God's light.)

Hymel's own life is a testament to the power of direct intervention by Christ in bleak or confusing times. Since childhood, Hymel has always possessed a measure of faith. He attended Catholic schools and even assisted at Mass as an altar server. Nevertheless, he said his "faith was missing something. It was not personal."

In high school, that changed. His faith was illuminated when he

went on a seminar called "Life in the Spirit," part of the Catholic charismatic renewal, that teaches people to bring the power of the Holy Spirit into their lives.

Hymel said this seminar brought him a new, more intimate relationship with God.

After graduating from high school, two competing desires left him anxious about his life's path. He desired a vocation of service to the church.

Simultaneously, he yearned for a vocation to marriage and family life. To him, these two desires seemed mutually exclusive.

"At that time, as a Catholic, it was either marriage or the priesthood," he said.

He entered the pre-med program at St. Mary's University in San Antonio. After one year, his studies were not going well. To make matters worse, the relationship he had hoped would lead to marriage came to an end.

Three years later, he graduated with degrees in philosophy and the-

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Francis Hymel, counselor for New Hope Pastoral.

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ology, but his vocation remained unclear. A glimmer of light appeared when a priest friend from St. Francis Catholic Church in San Antonio offered him a job. He worked for two years as director of religious education and youth minister at St. Francis, which confirmed his call to service in the church.

"It had to be a sign, it being at St. Francis," he said jokingly.

After two years, however, he needed more. That is when he met someone from the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Chicago's Loyola University. The institute provided a broad-based program for ministry and pastoral work. The student population consisted of an equal number of lay people and those who had taken religious vows. The dilemma between pastoral work and marriage evaporated.

In the fall of 1983, he met his wife, who was from Wichita Falls. He completed his studies at the Catholic Theological Union, also in Chicago. He came to Midland in 1989 as director of adult faith development and pastoral ministries at St. Ann's Church.

Approximately one year ago, Hymel began using the TheoPhostic method. In addition to yielding tangible results, he said it alleviates a common concern among many religious people that psychology is more sorcery than science.

Hymel said he always has incorporated an element of faith in his work, but in the TheoPhostic method, faith is foundational and permeates everything. Hymel describes his work as "psychological counseling that strongly integrates Christianity's spiritual dimensions. It's hard to put it into one sentence, but I like to call it a divine

encounter with human suffering."

He said it involves a series of what are called TheoPhostic interventions.

For example, a client may seek counseling regarding unwarranted anxiety. In the first intervention, Hymel and his client pray together. In their prayer, they ask God to take the client back to the first memory of experiencing the emotion. The memory may be visual, auditory or a physical sensation. Usually, this memory goes back to childhood, and a few people recall episodes even from the womb, he said.

In the second TheoPhostic intervention, Hymel and the client ask God to bring His light and truth to that child. They then wait in silence for Christ to present this illumination. Hymel then turns to Christ for confirmation. It is a triangular discussion between Christ, Hymel and the client.

Hymel said he believes Christ is truly there in the room at that moment.

"You have to trust that the risen Christ is living within you ..."

He seems to see proof that Christ is bringing truth and healing to his clients.

"The message from Christ is so effective, so constant. In the past, every time I would try with a client to dispel a false belief, that someone is worthless, or

unlovable, the result would last maybe a day. Christ's truth lasts forever."

When asked if any of the problems he encounters could be related to evil, Hymel said, "Without question, evil is real."

He has, at times, engaged in deliverance ministry with his clients. He usually finds, however, that evil can be expelled by the exposure of a lie and the revelation of God's truth to a person.

"The biggest lie is that we cannot be forgiven or healed. Someone once said that the only unforgivable sin is believing that we have committed the only unforgivable sin."

A landscape on the office wall is symbolic of his ministry. At its center is a house nestled between two ponds. The house is covered with clouds, which yield to golden sunlight, revealing the beauty of the home and its surroundings. By appealing to God's light, Hymel hopes to give others a truth that may set them free.

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For more information on New Hope Pastoral Counseling, call 687-HOPE (4673).