

## **Celebrate Recovery Chronology (Preliminary Notes)**

**Compiled by Rita Chaney**

Faith-based addiction recovery and related mutual aid fellowships have a long history in the United States, including groups such as the Calix Society (1947), Alcoholics Victorious (1948), Recovered Alcoholic Clergy Association (of the Episcopal Church) (1968), Alcoholics for Christ (1977), Overcomers Outreach (1977, 1985), Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent People and Significant Others (JACS, 1979), Liontamers Anonymous (1980), Addictions Victorious (1986), Addicts Victorious (1987), Overcomers in Christ (1987), International Ministers and Pastors in Recovery (1988), Millati Islami (1989), and Fellowship of Recovering Lutheran Clergy (1990). One of the most dynamic and rapidly growing of such groups is Celebrate Recovery (CR). I receive numerous requests for information on CR from varied parties. To add to historical chronologies and papers on recovery mutual aid groups posted on this website ([www.williamwhitepapers.com](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com)), my Research Assistant, Rita Chaney, has prepared the following chronology of CR drawn from the published professional and lay literature. It is our hope to soon follow this up with interviews with some of the key leaders within CR. This preliminary chronology (and the posted CR bibliography) should provide those scholars interested in doing research on CR starting points for their investigations. We will continue to expand this chronology when our own work progresses.

William L. White (November 2, 2015)

### **Pre-Celebrate Recovery**

- John Baker grows up in Christian home in Collinsville, Illinois, population 10,000. He was “convicted” to become a minister at 16. He attended the University of Missouri where he began drinking. He met his wife, Cheryl, and they were married in his senior year at the University of Missouri. Baker was in the Air Force during the Vietnam War. Later, he worked for the Scott Paper Company. He and Cheryl had two children, Laura and Johnny. He was successful at work, receiving 8 promotions in his first 11 years of his business career. However, his drinking increased while his church attendance decreased. Marital problems developed between he and Cheryl and he chose to leave his home rather than attend counseling. Eventually, Baker realized he had to stop drinking. He attended 90 AA meetings in 90 days. While visiting his children, they invited him to attend Saddleback Church with them and, although he had not attended church in five years, he agreed to go. He felt at home there. He and Cheryl began working out their marriage and reunited five months later, renewing their marriage vows. Baker subsequently joined a small church group but felt he was unable to share in the way he wanted to. So, in 1991, he wrote a 13-page letter to Pastor Rick Warren, describing the kind of group that he believed would provide support for him and others struggling with a variety of personal concerns. Pastor Rick Warren met with John and suggested John begin the group he had visualized in the letter. (9)

- Pastor John imagines a group to help those with substance use difficulties. He writes Pastor Rick a “13-page single-spaced” letter describing what the group would look like. Pastor Rick reportedly tells Pastor John to “Go do it,” and the group was begun. (1)

## **1991**

- Pastor John begins the Celebrate Recovery Group at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. At the time, the church was meeting in a high school gymnasium. Forty-five people attended the first group meeting. (1)
- Forty-three people attend the first Celebrate Recovery meeting. (11)
- Celebrate Recovery begins with 4 open-share groups—Men’s and Women’s Chemical Dependency and Men’s and Women’s Co-Dependency. (1)

## **1999**

- Tony and Val from Derby, England, begin running CR in England. (8)
- The New Mexico prison system begins to “test” Celebrate Recovery in their prisons. (10)
- The CR ministry at Saddleback Church is reported to have “helped 3,300 people in its eight-year existence.” (11)
- The original CR program at Saddleback is duplicated in more than 500 churches across the nation. (11)
- “Alcoholics and drug addicts make up only 30% of Celebrate Recovery’s membership.” (11)
- CR program at Saddleback Church attracts 70% of its members from outside the church. (11)
- Eighty-five percent of those participating in the CR program stay with the church. (11)

## **2004**

- In August 2004, California announces Celebrate Recovery is California’s state-approved substance use program for its prisons. (1)
- The Sierra Conservation Center, a prison 330 miles northwest of Saddleback Church, begins a Celebrate Recovery group. (2)
- In July 2004, the Sierra Conservation Center, a prison 330 miles northwest of Saddleback Church opens a separate building for the Celebrate Recovery program that includes a 200-bed therapeutic community similar to the prison’s secular recovery building. (2)
- Only 13 of 167 people who attended Celebrate Recovery while in a New Mexico prison and returned to prison after their release. This is a recidivism rate of 7.8 percent. Normally, New Mexico’s recidivism rate is 78 percent, according to John Baker. (10)
- Since its beginnings, 7,500 people have attended the Celebrate Recovery program at Saddleback in Lake Valley, CA. More than 150,000 people have participated in the program. Also, more than 2,500 churches have CR programs. (10)
- When CR program began at Saddleback, over 70 percent of attendees were Saddleback Church members. Currently, over 70 percent of attendees are drawn from the local community. (10)
- Celebrate Recovery’s curriculum is made available in Spanish. (10)
- The 2004 Celebrate Recovery Summit is held at Saddleback on August 18-20. Rick Warren, John Baker, John Townsend, Henry Cloud, and Steve Arterburn attend. (10)

**2006**

- In June 2006, Detention Sgt. Bill Cope from Tennessee reports that recovery initiatives to be added to Tennessee prisons include Celebrate Recovery Inside and AA. (3)

**2007**

- Joliet, Illinois' Praise Assembly Church begins Celebrate Recovery session on May 3, 2007. (6)
- More than a half-million people have had involvement with the CR program in more than 5,000 churches worldwide. (6)

**2008**

- "Tony" began serving as UK Regional Director for Celebrate Recovery. (8)

**2009**

- CR sessions begin in Kitcheners' prison for women in Canada during the week of February 5, 2009. (7)

**2011**

- Celebrate Recovery is reported to have been "pioneered by California megachurch pastor Rick Warren" and to use "Christ-centered Eight Principles instead of AA's more spiritually generic Twelve Steps." (5)
- Kelley Hendrix, leader of the 4-year-old weekly Celebrate Recovery service and meeting at Highpoint Church in East Memphis, Tennessee, affirms that the Higher Power in Celebrate Recovery is Jesus Christ. (5)
- The Commercial Appeal newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee reports on October 22, 2011 that "more than a dozen Memphis-area churches" have Celebrate Recovery programs. (5)

**2012**

- Over 22,000 Celebrate Recovery ministries exist around the world. (1)

**Current (N.D.)**

- Over 8,500 people have attended the Celebrate Recovery Program at Saddleback Ranch. (1)
- New Mexico has a Celebrate Recovery pod in every single prison in the state. (1)
- Celebrate Recovery has grown to over 14 open-share groups. (1)
- Celebrate Recovery is in over 20,000 churches worldwide. (4)

**Unknown Date**

- New Mexico was the first state to bring Celebrate Recovery into their prison system. (1)

**Celebrate Recovery Non-Professional Chronology Bibliography**

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