



# NEWS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Sabina Pastor Honored for Work to End Opiate Use, Addiction**

*Sabina, Ohio, October 26, 2016* – About the time a parishioner passed away due to overdose five years ago, Sabina United Methodist Church Pastor Joni Manson came across some information about a training in Cincinnati that focused on addiction.

At the time, she thought she'd apply it locally in the form of a support group to help deal with the heroin and opiate addiction that's spread across the region.

"I had talked with a friend of this person after the funeral, and in the process learned about a training in Cincinnati that focused on addiction. I decided to pursue it and learn what else I could do to help people with addiction issues and thoughts of harming themselves. That's where 'Arms of Hope' began."

Today, after five years of work – plus a recent non-profit designation from the Ohio Secretary of State – Manson and a group of dedicated individuals have grown the interfaith program "Arms of Hope" into a safe place for people addicted to heroin and opiates to find new confidence through support groups like Narcotics Anonymous. It also aims to reduce stigma around suicide and mental health issues, and to offer teens an alternative social environment.

It's that work that recently earned Manson the Power of Prevention Award from the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Warren & Clinton Counties. The group presented Pastor Manson with the award earlier this month as part of a church service.

Officially called "Arms of Hope of Sabina", the organization's roots in that Cincinnati training found fertile ground at Sabina UMC. It is a place for anyone – kids, teens, even older adults.

"'Arms of Hope' started as a prayer group," Manson said. "The prayer group got underway after we'd had meetings to talk about helping families and friends of people living with addiction."

## ***SPC Honors Sabina Pastor***

The first meetings started with a few folks, then grew. Manson said she saw lots of people coming to those meetings.

“Later, I met with other clergy and other residents who were interested in expanding those offerings to prevent suicide and address the heroin and opiate epidemic. We knew we wanted to provide a safe space for all to help people thinking of harming themselves or who wanted to talk about their addiction. Recovery isn’t easy, and we wanted to acknowledge that.”

Since starting “Arms of Hope”, Manson said the group – made up largely of volunteers trained in Mental Health First Aid – has served about 45 people in NA and AA meetings. Manson said meetings have averaged as many as 16 people each time. Volunteers must complete Mental Health First Aid training to work with anyone who seeks help. At least one volunteer trained in Mental Health First Aid will be present at all times.

Now that the organization has received its non-profit status, Manson said it’s looking to expand support groups and other activities in a new place. She said Narcotics Anonymous could meet in both the church and the new location.

“We’re working on a storefront location on North Howard Street in Sabina,” Manson said. “We’re calling it ‘A Place to Go’ that will have sitting areas, prayer areas, a place to host NA and AA meetings, a resource table for recovery materials, and even job information. It’s going to be a neat place for everyone who needs ... a place to go.”

### **About the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Warren & Clinton Counties**

The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Warren and Clinton Counties is a partner group of Mental Health Recovery Services of Warren & Clinton Counties, the local board of mental health and addiction services. The Suicide Prevention Coalition works to prevent suicide by mobilizing community through education and awareness. The Coalition is comprised of individuals who are survivors of suicide and staff from local social service agencies, local government boards, law enforcement and interested residents.

### **About MHRS**

Mental Health Recovery Services of Warren and Clinton Counties (MHRS) is the local board of alcohol, drug addiction and mental health services serving residents of Warren and Clinton Counties. MHRS plans, funds and monitors services for residents with mental health, alcohol and addiction issues by contracting with local agencies to provide programs for individuals, families and others affected by mental illness and addiction. For more information about MHRS or the Suicide Prevention Coalition, visit the MHRS website at [mhrsonline.org](http://mhrsonline.org).

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**SUGGESTED PHOTO CAPTION:** Sabina UMC Pastor Joni Manson (second from right) recently received the Power of Prevention Award from the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Warren & Clinton Counties. Pictured with Manson are (left to right) SPC members Scott and Kathy Michelich, Barbara Adams Marin and James Syphax of Solutions Community Counseling & Recovery Centers, and MHRS Associate Director Patti Ahting.

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