

The Archdiocese of Boston's iTHIRST program—the first of its kind in the nation—is now a model for others and offers spiritual companions for individuals in addiction recovery and support for their families. Keaton Douglas, founder of iTHIRST, shares the stories of **James** and **Melinda** whose lives have been changed by this program.

James

43-year-old James walked through the doors of an iTHIRST retreat house with doubtful apprehension. A stint in prison landed him in a court ordered treatment facility, which had brought him to this particular retreat, where he would share that he had spent the last 15 years homeless and addicted to heroin, living in bus and train terminals, all as a result of a Vicodin prescription given for a pulled tooth. He admitted that the Vicodin made him forget the pain of being the only kid at school with a father in prison, a kid who struggled with his own identity, a kid who was the constant focus of bullies throughout his life.

James' doubtful apprehension morphed into intrigue and curiosity as he was greeted by iTHIRST volunteers who welcomed him with warm hugs and kind words. He had not had any connection with God up until that moment but wondered about the volunteers who were ministering to him out of love. Who was this God that motivated them with such passion?

Something clicked for James over the course of that retreat, and he fully committed himself to his recovery. Now six years later, he is a well-respected member of the iTHIRST Team, sharing his story with college students, confirmation candidates, and others. He also works full-time as a peer recovery specialist in a hospital, where he gets a chance to extend God's love and compassion to others, just as it was extended to him. James' story is not only about the perils of addiction, but how the development of a relationship with Christ can help us through all our trials and give our lives meaning and purpose.

Melinda

Melinda lost her beloved firstborn son, Nunzio, to a fentanyl overdose in 2018 after a 15-year struggle with addiction. It all began with an Oxycontin prescription he received after a minor surgery. Because of the shame and stigma associated with the disease, Nunzio hid his addiction from his family for years. By the time Melinda and her husband realized what was really going on, it was too late.

Melinda realized that her son longed for spiritual healing, but no one in her church understood or was equipped to address the nature of addiction as a spiritual disease with devastating physiological and psychological effects. For this reason, Melinda committed to helping empower the Church to be a resource for those suffering from addictions and their families. She joined the very first iTHIRST cohort and completed her training in the Fall of 2020. She credits that training with saving her from the grief she felt after losing Nunzio.

Today, Melinda is a true warrior in the fight to end the stigma of addiction, carrying with her Nunzio's legacy, as she works as a Spiritual Companion in a multifaceted recovery ministry that she created at her parish. As a professor at a Catholic university, she has developed programs which allow students to understand the concept of addiction through the interface of their Catholic faith and their coursework. As a bereaved mom, Melinda uses her personal experience and her iTHIRST formation to help her work one-on-one with other parents who are struggling with their children's addictions.

Your support of the Catholic Appeal makes these life-saving programs possible.

Please make your gift or pledge TODAY!



The following parishes and organizations within the Archdiocese of Boston currently have volunteers who have been trained as iTHIRST spiritual companions and are available to help anyone along their journey through addiction recovery:

Chaplaincy Office, Pastoral Center, Braintree
(617) 746-5843

Holy Family, Duxbury
(781) 934-5055

Holy Family, Lynn
(781) 595-7487

Irish Pastoral Centre, Dorchester
(617) 265-5300

Mary Immaculate of Lourdes, Newton
(617) 244-0558

Most Precious Blood, Hyde Park
(857) 342-9500

Our Lady of Good Voyage, Boston
(339) 201-1184

Sacred Heart, Middleboro
(508) 947-0444

Saint Agatha, Milton
(617) 698-2439

Saint Agnes, Middleton
(978) 774-1958

Saint Anne, Readville
(857) 342-9500

Saint Augustine, Andover
(978) 475-0050

Saint Catherine of Siena, Norwood
(781) 762-6080

Saint Cecilia, Boston
(617) 536-4548

Saint Clare, Braintree
(781) 843-1332

Saint Dorothy, Wilmington
(978) 658-4665

Saint Edward, Medfield
(508) 359-2633

Saint Elizabeth, Milton
(617) 696-6688

Saint Francis of Assisi, Braintree
(781) 843-1332

Saint Francis of Assisi, Dracut
(978) 452-6611

Saint Joseph, Holbrook
(781) 767-0605

Saint Jude, Norfolk
(508) 528-0170

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Plymouth
(508) 747-1568

Saint Mary, Foxborough
(508) 543-7726

Saint Mary, Plymouth
(508) 746-0426

Saint Mary of the Annunciation, Cambridge
(617) 547-0120

Saint Mary of the Hills, Milton
(617) 696-0120

Saint Paul, Cambridge
(617) 491-8400

Saint Peter, Plymouth
(508) 747-1568

Saint Pius V, Lynn
(781) 595-7487

Saint Pius X, Milton
(857) 342-9500

Saint Rose of Lima, Topsfield
(978) 887-5505

Saint Theresa, North Reading
(978) 664-3412

St. Thomas of Villanova, Wilmington
(978) 658-4665