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PROVIDENCE, R.I. - He walks up an aisle from the altar with his black pressed two-piece suit. He wears a bright smile while shaking hands with many members and visitors of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Providence, R.I. His eyes sparkle as he greets them and ask how they are doing. The people smile back but they do not know the struggle he overcame to be who he is today.

The Rev. Herman Falu, 36, is a minister at Ebenezer and a licensed substance abuse counselor for the Providence Center. He works in the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI). He has been a student at Zion Bible College in Barrington, R.I., since 2010 studying Theology and pastoral counseling. He has a daughter, a step-son and he is married. Falu is a former alcoholic who has been sober for seven years from an addiction that held him for 12. His faith in God never shattered despite his surroundings and addiction.

Falu, second of three children, was born and raised in Bronx, N.Y. Miriam Falu, his mother who has been sober for 11 years, said Herman Falu was very playful and loved to play football.

“(He) loved to be outside period,” she said.

Herman Falu started working at 12 years old at Key-Food supermarket where his father, Herman Falu, Sr., was the manager. Herman J. Falu, Jr., bagged groceries. When he was 13 he was a junior counselor for a program called Community of a Vision of Excellence (COVE).

COVE's, which was in the basement of his family's apartment building, mission was to keep the youth from trouble like gangs. Falu helped first and second graders with their homework in this program.

"He was a good kid," Miriam Falu said.

When Herman Falu was a child, he said, he dreamed of becoming a professional boxer. He was inspired by an uncle who was a boxer. However, he said, this dream was natural since he lived in a fast city that was multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. His parents were also alcoholics and fought.

"I (have) never seen physical fighting," he said. "(There was) A lot of yelling and cursing."

Falu endured physical and verbal abuse from his mother after his parents fought.

He took his first drink of alcohol at 8. When he was around 14 and 15 he experimented with alcohol. He was arrested at 16 for attempted murder when he was caught by the police beating a peer.

While he was waiting for his court date, he was arrested for carrying a loaded .25 caliber handgun. In jail he read a gospel tract that a woman gave him. Then he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. The court released him without giving him a reason.

"God basically performed a miracle," Falu said. "They let me go and that's when my (spiritual) journey started."

He attended Glad Tidings Church in Bronx, N.Y. Since then, he always dreamed of becoming a minister.

Miriam Falu, Herman Falu's younger sister, Jamie Falu, and Herman Falu moved to Florida and Herman Falu, Sr. joined them later.

“I wanted a better life for my kids,” Miriam Falu said, “(I) wanted to start fresh with all of them.”

Herman J. Falu, Jr. lived in Florida for seven months. He graduated Winter Haven High School in Winter Haven, Fla. This was when his alcoholism became severe.

Miriam Falu said her son would return home drunk and hid bottles around the house. Although she and her husband were alcoholics she yelled at him.

“That (alcoholism) is not what I wanted for him,” said Miriam Falu.

Herman Falu moved to Rhode Island at 18. He was offered an opportunity to help the Rev. William Brown of Harvest Outreach in Providence, R.I., with the church’s youth ministry.

Falu lived with Brown and his family. While he helped Brown, he did not drink. Falu said that working and living with Brown helped him focus on God. He spent his time street witnessing with Brown.

Falu was a dishwasher at Chelos in Pawtucket. There he met his first wife, Maria Gregoire. Brown encouraged Falu to marry her.

“(Brown said) As being a leader, it looks good being married,” Falu said. “It’s a healthy thing.”

Falu said the marriage was good in the beginning. He purchased a house and worked for the Jim Brown Program, Amer-I-CAN, a program that helped troubled youth succeed academically and contribute positively to society. He worked for Amer-I-CAN in William E. Tolman High School in Pawtucket for three years and the Rhode Island Training School in Cranston for three years. He worked part-time job at the YMCA as a junior counselor.

He became associate pastor at the House of Praise and Worship in Pawtucket. He worked with Falu and the senior pastor the Rev. Jose Torres would take turns preaching and Falu taught Bible studies.

“I always had like two or three jobs,” he said.

Darrell Williams, a close friend of Falu, met him on the first day of work at Amer-I-CAN. In the beginning of their friendship Williams never noticed that Falu had a problem.

“Everything seemed put together with Herman,” Williams said.

Williams said Falu was organized, articulate, and very charismatic. He was always conscious of paying his bills and he was married.

A year into pastoring, two years into marriage, and still working for Amer-I-CAN, Falu began to drink again.

“I started to implode,” he said. “I was young; I didn’t know how to manage these things.”

Falu felt his position as associate pastor. He continued attending the church but eventually stopped. He started going to clubs and him and his wife argued.

Williams, who went to the club with Falu, did not notice Falu’s drinking problem until he noticed Falu’s drinking became out of control. Williams said he felt like a babysitter.

“When we did go out I knew I had to monitor him,” Williams said. “(We) wouldn’t separate for too long and (I was) keeping him in eye-sight.”

Williams said Falu was an unpredictable drunk. Falu liked to challenge men bigger than him and was very needy. He went to Williams’s home to drink and discuss his marriage problems. Williams recalled a night when Falu drank a bottle in one gulp.

“Then I said to myself, you (Falu) got a problem,” Williams said.

Williams applied what he called tough-love on his relationship with Falu. He stopped going out with him but continued to communicate with him.

“Deep down I knew that wasn’t him,” Williams said. “You don’t want to see you friend develop a habit like that.”

Falu divorced after 4 ½ years. He met Alice Negrón, the mother of his daughter, Grace, in a club. He lived with her when his alcoholism worsened.

Falu was in six car accidents. One was a DUI.

“Don’t ask why I didn’t get caught,” he said. “But everything was alcohol related.”

His first daughter, Charisma, died at 3 hours old the day after 9/11.