

Roundtable Monthly Prayer

Introduction

For over 65 Years, the month of May has been observed as Mental Health Month. We know that mental health involves the whole community. It can be difficult to imagine that 50% of all adults will develop some kind of mental illness in their lifetime (e.g. depression, anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders, bi-polar disorder, PTSD, etc.) and that 1 in 4 individuals sitting in our pews have a family member struggling with mental health issues.

During the month of May, we have the opportunity to preach good news of hope and healing to our people, many of whom are either suffering with a mental illness or know someone who is. Some things to think about include: :

- Catholic social teaching calls us to recognize that each person has dignity and each life is sacred. As temples of the Holy Spirit, each of us is due respect and care, regardless of any illness.
- We are talking about “people with mental illness”.....not “mentally ill people”. This use of language preserves the dignity of people and counters negative imagery.
- Just as with all other illness, pastors and parish staff members can be frightened or awkward when ministering to people with mental illness. Conversations amongst staff members can help; as those called to serve our people, if we can admit our feelings, we can deal with them, put them aside, and be free to minister as would Jesus.
- Persons with mental illness and their families are in need and often come to the parish seeking help. Do our parishioners with mental illness find a welcome in our parishes? Do our parishes have appropriate referrals to give to those who come to us for help?
- The staggering reality of mental illness in our society can be confronted by the virtue of hope that church communities provide in prayer and with programs for those suffering and their families.
- Hope says you are not defined by your illness. Hope says your life has a purpose even when you don't feel it. Hope says you are not alone.
- To acknowledge mental illness publicly within a liturgical setting (in homilies and petitions) can provide the atmosphere for people to come forward and seek help/guidance/assistance through the parish.
- Offering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to those suffering with mental illness is grace not only for the one who is ill, but a sign of love and acceptance for their families.

Opening Prayer

Let us begin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Lord we pray for those who have a mental illness. Help us understand that the way we talk about people with a mental illness affects the people themselves and how we treat the illness. So often people who have a mental illness are known as their illness; people say that “she is bipolar” or “he is schizophrenic”; when we talk about mental illness we should not use that phrase. People who have cancer are not cancer; those with heart disease are not heart disease. Let us always remember that people with a mental illness are not the illness – they are beautiful creations of God.

There is so much fear, ignorance and hurtful attitudes that the people who suffer from mental illness needlessly suffer further. Help us to support and be compassionate to those with a mental illness, every bit as much as we support those who suffer from any other illness. Grant courage to those for whom we pray and fill them with hope. If it is according to Your Divine Will, grant them the recovery and cure they desire. Help them to remember You love them; they are never alone. Lord we Pray for those who have a Mental Illness. Saint Dymphna, Patron of those with a Mental Illness, pray for us.

Reflection

As Catholics, we are called to embrace an ever-clearer vision of each human person

as created by God with inherent dignity and worth. This truth is not diminished when someone struggles with various illnesses or behaviors, including mental health concerns. Pope St. John Paul II reminded us of this fundamental truth in 1996 at the International Conference for Health Care Workers: **“Whoever suffers from mental illness always bears God’s image and likeness in themselves, as does every human being. in addition, they always have the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such.”**

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think and act and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. When a person suffers from mental illness, it can interfere with their everyday life and can result in an inability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines. Mental illness, as with any health-related issue,

can vary in severity and look very different from person to person. Mental illness affects the mind, body and the spirit. It is a real, common and treatable illness. Mental illnesses are far more common than cancer, diabetes, heart disease or arthritis.

Our faith communities can be an important part of the recovery process through education, support and by helping individuals and families feel part of a caring community.

Oftentimes, we may not observe the warning signs that someone is struggling with their mental health. This does not mean that the warning signs are not there, or that the problem is insignificant and should be ignored. Unfortunately, there is also stigma attached to mental illness which may lead people who are struggling to isolate themselves, choosing not to share that they are hurting, and not seek help or treatment. As a faith community, we are called to support our brothers and sisters suffering from a mental health condition, offering the unconditional and non-judgmental love they deserve. Rather than accept the misconceptions surrounding mental illness, we can increase our awareness of its symptoms and effects, and identify the local resources. Moreover, we must be in relationship with others, bringing hope and comfort in times of crisis or pain by offering prayers of healing and accompaniment through treatment. Together, our institutions can be a place of healing for all people and their families!

Reflection questions:

1. How would I react if I found out a close friend or family member has been diagnosed with a mental health condition?
2. How has the media shaped my image of mental illness?
3. What can I do to reduce the stigma?
4. How can we as a family care for the mental health of each other?
5. Are we aware of the barriers that people with a mental health condition and their families experience in our community?
6. How can we make our community a safe space for all families?
7. How do we ensure our community is welcoming and inviting all people into a deeper relationship with God - not only into participation but also in leadership?

Litany of Naming

Leader: During this month of Mental Health Awareness, we join in this Litany of Naming. As a national community we are glad to lift up our voices and our spirits to break the silence that often happens when we are confronted with mental illness. As a community, we name the gifts and the often unnamed experiences which come to those who live with a mental illness such as major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, and eating disorder. We name:

People: The Hope which upholds our spirit through honest sharing;

Leader: The Pain when people turn away because of fear;

People: The Courage to speak in a safe place the way that Jesus spoke truth with love;

Leader: The Strength from being with others who listen compassionately;

Leader: The Isolation that comes when no one knows what to say;

People: The Realization that mental illnesses and brain disorders can be managed;

Leader: The Exhaustion that comes with living with a mental illness as well as for those who are caregivers;

People: The Welcome of mental health as part of our church's ministry and outreach;

Leader: The Wisdom that comes when we become educated about mental health;

Leader: The Spirituality that comes when we walk alongside those who show both resilience and vulnerability in their lives affected by mental illness;

All: We receive these gifts that we have named, those which are welcomed and those that are challenges. We come before you, our God, knowing we are not alone and that You will show us a way to be and live.

Poem: Each Day

1. I will recall that I am a child of God. I am one who is created out of Love. I am chosen, good, holy and have purpose...a task to perform here on Earth before I return to the Father. I deserve to be treated as a person who has value and dignity.
2. I will embrace my illness or my family member's illness as a friend this day looking for what it is teaching me about the mystery of God and Life.
3. I will not allow the stigma of mental illness to defeat me this day. I will choose to have power over stigma by detaching myself from the stigma.
4. I will talk to someone today who will encourage me to see my goodness and holiness as a child of God. Maybe we will share a prayer together for one another.

5. I will look for humor and reasons to laugh and be happy. Quiet joy will be my goal.
6. I will read a passage from Scripture or something from a book of devotion, inspiration or spiritual reading that will encourage me to trust and hope in the power and love of God.
7. I will seek twenty minutes of solitude, silence, prayer this day. If my mind won't quiet down, if my thoughts keep racing, I will offer that as my prayer to God. If necessary and helpful, I will listen to soothing instrumental music or inspirational/religious music to quiet me and remind me that God is present.
8. I will walk outdoors marveling at a sunrise, a sunset, the song of a bird, the soothing colors of nature...the serenity of green grass, a blue sky, the softness of the pastel colored blossoms of Springtime and the peaceful waters of a river, lake or stream that ripple and flow. I will remind myself that everything in nature is a reflection of the Creator and pleases the Creator just as it is and so do I just as I am.
9. I will delight in the knowledge that we are each created different because it is in our differences we make a more powerful and beautiful whole. We each reflect a different aspect of the mystery of Life and God. Individually and together we are a Masterpiece!
10. In God is my hope and my joy. I will give honor, glory and praise to God knowing and trusting what God has in store for me. We do not seek or like suffering but our suffering can make us strong in many ways and more compassionate and loving to others...our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Knowing for sure that although I long for God, God's longing for me is even greater. I will rest in that knowledge this day. *By Rita Sebastian Lambert*

Closing Prayer

Let us close in prayer.

Creator God, You made all things and created humanity in Your own image. Help us to always be mindful of this dignity in ourselves and others. May we not despair when faced with the struggles of mental health, but instead find hope in you, knowing you have a greater plan for us. Guide us to be advocates in our families, parishes, schools, and communities, always seeking to build a

communion that embraces and values all people. We ask this in the name of Your son, Jesus our Savior and Shepherd of Peace. Amen.

Concluding video: there is hope