

A Healing Agent: The Chicago Catholic Archdiocesan Commission On Mental Illness

People with mental illness and their families often encounter stigma and societal misunderstanding about these illnesses. Sadly, the misconceptions about serious mental illness often keep people from seeking treatment and from participating in their faith communities. Feeling unwelcome at church, they also may feel rejected by God. Parishes can challenge those assumptions by accepting and reaching out to people with serious and persistent mental illness as well as their families – to open doors and minds to the gifts of all God’s people. An essential part of recovery from illnesses is spiritual healing. When faith communities welcome and embrace all God’s people, they too are healed and enriched.

In the Archdiocese of Chicago, a few volunteers started The Archdiocesan Commission on Mental Illness. Over the past 20 plus years, we have tried, in different ways, to increase awareness of the needs of people with mental illness and families, and break through barriers of misunderstanding. Our annual Mass

for people with mental illness celebrates their lives and that of their families, friends and professionals who are part of the healing process. We gather for worship and fellowship as an opportunity for getting to know one another as people of God.

We also provide workshops and seminars for clergy, chaplains, seminarians, parish ministerial leaders and anyone who will listen! Our motto is: “Where two or three are gathered, we’ll come and speak.” If one person’s mind is changed, or one’s commitment increased, we have been successful. We also collaborate with **Faith and Fellowship** which ministers to people in residential facilities who have mental illness. For some, Faith and Fellowship is their only spiritual support. Occasionally, we offer retreats and days of recollection. Other parts of our network include the St Dymphna Society and St Thomas of Villanova. Information for all these is on our website www.miministry.org which also provides prayers, educational material, and announcements of events.

Our commission comprises a dedicated group of volunteers including people with mental illness, family members, clergy and professionals. We have seen what a difference God makes in all of our lives, and what a difference being accepted by a community makes in the healing process. It confirms God is an essential part of who we are and a critical part of our being whole. That

message is worth shouting from the rooftops!

For more information about our ministry contact Deacon Tom Lambert at 773-525-0453 x21 or olmcinfo2@aol.com

Key Ideas: For Parishes

See our website www.miministry.org for “16 Specific Actions for Parishes” such as offer homilies and Prayers of the Faithful for persons with mental illness and their families.

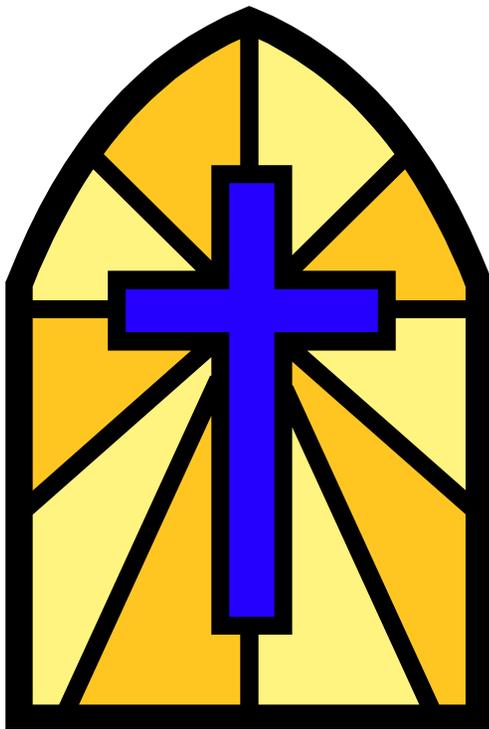
Visit and bring Holy Communion to parishioners in mental health facilities and homes, just as the Ministers of Communion groups do for the physically ill.

Welcome people back to the spiritual community when they are discharged from a mental health facility by visiting and accompanying them at church.

Offer workshops and discussions at ministry meetings on the topic of mental health and spirituality.

Contact the Archdiocesan Commission on Mental Illness at 773-525-0453 x21. We provide speakers, educational resources, collaboration between parishes and networking for those concerned with mental health issues.

Archdiocesan Commission On Mental Illness



The following prayer is said daily

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. Amen

By Rita Sebastian Lambert