



Supporting Parishioners with Mental Illness

Depending on the source, statistics say that one in three or four people are affected by mental illness, whether their own illness or that of a family member. One in 22-25 adults experiences a serious mental illness that interferes with or limits major life activities. The following are ways you and your parish can support people with mental illness who are present in every congregation.

Attend

Notice who is at Sunday Mass and who is missing. Observe how people interact with one another and with a new person, especially if they look or act differently.

Welcome

Everyone in the pews can communicate hospitality; don't leave it up to greeters, ushers and clergy. Physical environment can also communicate welcome, for example, bulletin board announcements for mental health resources and support groups.

Include

Personally invite people with mental illness to participate, volunteer, and minister in the parish. Offer companionship that extends beyond the church doors when needed.

Accommodate

People with mental illness may exhibit atypical church behavior, such as pacing or self-talk. Tolerate these "disturbances" the same as you would someone with chronic lung disease at Mass, who may cough or wheeze. Don't prejudge someone wearing earphones as disrespectful. They may need earphones to drown out hallucinatory voices which prevent them at Mass from paying attention. Seriously inappropriate or dangerous behavior is not permissible. It should be addressed respectfully, giving the person the opportunity to change their behavior.

Pray

Pray with and for persons with mental illness in private and communal intentions. Spread the message of hope. Homilies can clarify Scripture passages that may associate demonic possession with mental illness, or that may be misunderstood by someone with irrational thoughts.

Learn&Teach

Collaborate with community resources to host workshops, health fairs, and/or support groups at your parish. Peace and justice committees can examine issues of poverty, homelessness and incarceration that relate to persons with mental illness.

Know

Locate local community mental health agencies when a referral is needed or in case of a crisis. Find out where group homes or other residences for people with mental illness are located within your parish so you can extend an invitation to them.

Resources:

[Welcomed & Valued](#), DVD and resource manual, National Catholic Partnership on Disability.

[Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders](#), American Psychiatric Association Foundation

Thank you Catholic Diocese of Toledo, Ohio for sharing the original document with us

