

Guidelines for Catholic Mental Health Ministry Implementation in Parishes in the Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend

Version 1.01



In partnership with



The Association of
Catholic Mental
Health Ministers

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Introduction

Diocesan Mental Health Ministries at Catholic Charities Fort Wayne – South Bend was inaugurated on August 14, 2024 thanks to the generous gift from The Valinhos Foundation.

Diocesan Mental Health Ministries is not a clinical resource and is not intended to serve as a substitute for treatment or counseling with a qualified professional.

Our Mission

Catholic Mental Health Ministry (CMHM) is being established in the Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend to accompany those with mental health needs in our parish and school communities in a Catholic, sustainable, ethical, and meaningful way. The focus of this ministry will be education, accompaniment, and advocacy.

Education

CMHM aims to provide training for clergy, diocesan and parish staff, and laity on mental health literacy. Educational events around various mental health topics in parish settings will help promote the reduction of mental illness stigma, increase awareness and understanding, and support parish communities to respond to mental health crises and loss to suicide.

Accompaniment

CMHM intentionally focuses on meeting people where they are. CMHM aims to create safe spaces and offer support groups for those experiencing mental health challenges and those who care for them. We want to accompany, offer support, understanding and prayers, and connect to community resources as needed.

Advocacy

CMHM is a voice for those experiencing mental health and substance use challenges. CMHM ministers in the diocese help others find their voice and speak for themselves, looking at their capacities and strengths. CMHM will also with coalitions and local leaders in counties within the Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend to give voice to those struggling with mental illness, effect policy change and assure that mental health is at the forefront of discussions.

“I wish to emphasize the profound importance of mental health and the necessity of seeking treatment for those who struggle with mental illness. Our faith calls us to care for the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. Establishing and engaging with Catholic Mental Health Ministries in our diocese is vital. These ministries not only provide essential education and resources but also offer accompaniment and advocacy for individuals, families, and caregivers navigating the challenges of mental illness. It is our duty to foster a culture of understanding and compassion, breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health, and ensuring that every person knows they are valued and loved by God. Together, let us build a supportive community where healing and hope flourish for all.”

- Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend



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Help End the Stigma

As a church we can help end the stigma. National Council for Mental Wellbeing (2024) states that, “Mental health stigma means the negative attitudes toward people with mental health challenges. Mental health stigma can lead to discrimination, which is when people with mental health challenges are treated differently because of their illness. Stigma can make it hard for people to talk about their challenges.” Using respectful language does not equate the person to their illness. They are living with schizophrenia or have bipolar disorder.

A Parish Mental Health Ministry can provide safe spaces for people. The space will be a place where they can share their thoughts, feelings, experiences and feel they belong. The Church can respond to the needs of individuals who may need additional support, such as connecting families and individuals to a mental health professional. Individuals who experience mental health challenges and illness may also experience shame, causing them to isolate, creating a barrier to engaging in the Church's life.

Having open conversations about mental health helps eliminate the stigma. Continue to educate yourself and those around you and see how it can help instill courage in others to do the same.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2024), some of the harmful effects of stigma can include:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers, or others
- Fewer opportunities for work, school or social activities or trouble finding housing
- Bullying, physical violence or harassment
- Health insurance that doesn't adequately cover your mental illness treatment
- The belief that you'll never succeed at certain challenges or that you can't improve your situation

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (2024) offers some suggestions about what we can do to help reduce the stigma of mental illness:

- Talk openly about mental health, such as sharing with others.
- Educate yourself and others – respond to misperceptions or negative comments by sharing facts and experiences.
- Be conscious of language – remind people that words matter.
- Encourage equality between physical and mental illness – draw comparisons to how they would treat someone with cancer or diabetes.
- Show compassion for those with mental illness.

- Be honest about treatment – normalize mental health treatment, just like other health care treatments.
- Let the media know when they are using stigmatizing language presenting stories of mental illness in a stigmatizing way.
- Choose empowerment over shame.

Parish Mental Health Ministry Sample Plan

Step 1: Pastor and Diocesan Mental Health Ministry Facilitator Meeting:

- Discuss pastor's role and responsibilities (see section on Mental Health Ministry Pastor and Parish Volunteer Involvement).
 - Assign a parish volunteer Mental Health Ministry Coordinator.
 - Parish MHM Coordinator will work closely with the Catholic Charities' Diocesan Mental Health Ministry Facilitator for ongoing support and further development.

Step 2: Parish Assessment and Team Training

- MHM Coordinator and Pastor discuss candidates for mental health ministry core team within the parish community. If needed and appropriate, inform your parish community about mental health ministry to recruit core team members.
 - Use space in your bulletin, flock note or newsletters.
 - Hold a fellowship gathering after mass.
 - Talk about the steps you want to take to implement the mental health ministry at your parish.
 - Invite parishioners to volunteer. You can start with three or four volunteers.
- The core team contacts the Catholic Charities' Diocesan Mental Health Ministry Facilitator to schedule a mental health literacy training and MHM parish implementation training.
 - Mental Health Literacy Training Options (available in English and Spanish):
 - Adult or Youth Mental Health First Aid (required)
 - Sanctuary Course for Catholics (recommended ongoing training)
 - [The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers Learning Center](#)
 - [CMHM Learning Center](#)
 - [Introduction to Catholic Mental Health Ministry Course](#) (Cohort Option or Film and Resources asynchronous option)
 - Safe Environment Training for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- The Core team conducts an initial parish needs assessment (part of the Introduction to Catholic Mental Health Ministry Course)
- Core team develops an Implementation Plan
 - Consider implementing your MHM in phases. For example,
 - Phase 1 – Educational Series with speakers or Structured Group with video series and discussion
 - Phase 2 – Prayer Service or Special Liturgy
 - Phase 3 – Launching an Open Support Group
- Consider holding a [Rite of Blessing and Commissioning for Mental Health Ministers](#)

Step 3: Launch Mental Health Ministry and Obtain Feedback

- Utilize implementation plan to promote goals of education, accompaniment, and advocacy for individuals and families experiencing mental illness in the parish community and to promote mental and emotional wellness.

- Utilize surveys at events to obtain feedback.
- Obtain continued education and support for core team and consult with Diocesan Mental Health Ministries Facilitator as needed.

Examples to Focus Parish Implementation Plan on Core Pillars

Education

- Raise awareness during Mental Health Month in May, Feast of Saint Dymphna on May 15, Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in September, Mental Health Awareness Week in October.
- Invite speakers to offer presentations and workshops on topics related to mental health and wellness.
- Encourage all faith leaders, teachers, volunteers, and parishioners to attend a Mental Health First Aid class or host a training at your parish.
- Resources available:
 - [Mental Health Literacy Guide](#) produced by the [National Catholic Partnership on Disability Council on Mental Illness](#)

Accompaniment

- A designated space or room at a parish or school that is a safe space, a place of encounter for those experiencing challenges to gather and share their experiences and grow their relationship with God. A place for support groups, educational workshops, and opportunity for accompaniment.
 - Open Spiritual Support Groups
 - Resources for Advertisement, Facilitation, Meeting Guidelines and Agendas: [Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers](#)
 - Structured Mental Health and Wellness Group
 - [The Sanctuary Course for Catholics](#) (Available in English and Spanish)
 - [Whole Hearted \(Parish Based Trauma Awareness Program\)](#)
 - Available in English and Spanish; Adult and Young Adult versions
 - [Survivors of Suicide Loss: When a Loved One Dies by Suicide](#) - Video Series and Book

Advocacy

- Be the voice for others, reminding them that they are not alone, that there is light, healing, and hope through this journey.
- Advocate for yourself by practicing self-love, self-compassion, and self-respect so that you can advocate for others.
- Connect to community resources as needed (see [CCFWSB Mental Health Ministries](#) website for a list of resources)

Mental Health Ministry Pastor and Parish Volunteer Involvement

Mental Health Ministry Pastor Role and Responsibilities

1. Be actively supportive of MHM within the parish.
2. Make recommendations for team members including parishioners who might benefit from MHM.
3. Participate in the team selection process.
4. When appropriate, include mental health issues in homilies so that the parish becomes more inclusive in supporting those who live with mental illness.
5. Include information about the MHM and its meeting in the bulletin.
6. Include prayers for those living with mental illness in the Prayers of the Faithful especially during months set aside for Mental Health Awareness.
7. Receive periodic updates on the group meetings and events from the Parish Mental Health Ministry Coordinator.
8. Communicate suggestions for improvement or concerns to the Parish Mental Health Ministry Coordinator, and the Diocesan Mental Health Ministry Facilitator and Advisory Council as needed.
9. Be informed of issues arising from MHM meetings or group members and, where needed, participate in their resolutions with the Parish Mental Health Ministry Coordinator and the core team.
10. Be supportive of the need to maintain the confidentiality of group members.
11. Where possible, occasionally attend and participate in a group meeting or social activity.
12. Provide this ministry with the same opportunities and benefits as other parish ministries, including securing financial support from the parish or other sources.

Mental Health Ministry Coordinator Description and Qualifications

The Mental Health Ministry Coordinator is a volunteer position usually within a parish who will be responsible for:

- Living the mission of being Christ in the lives of others by educating, accompanying, and advocating in times of need.
- Connecting individuals and families to community resources as needed through their knowledge of community resources and how to access resources through the Clinical Liaison at Catholic Charities.
- Adhering to parish and school Policy and Procedure for the Protection of Minors by maintaining up to date Safe Environment Training and Background Check.
- Being the point of contact for the Catholic Charities Diocesan Mental Health Ministries Facilitator and local parish needs.

- Coordinating Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) trainings, support groups, speaker series, etc. in consultation and direction of the pastor.
- Attending meetings with the Diocesan Mental Health Ministries Facilitator as needed.

Qualifications and Skills

- Working knowledge of Microsoft Office computer software programs, scheduling appointments, and using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other virtual meeting platforms.
- Collaboration with parish staff for scheduling space for MHM ministry meetings and equipment set up.
- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy.
- Communicating effectively, especially to small and large groups, for managing a core team, facilitating support groups and coordinating parish-based educational and liturgical/prayer events.

(No specialized educational background is needed to be a Mental Health Ministry Coordinator or Core Team Member. To help maintain clear boundaries as to the nonclinical nature of this ministry, the MHM Coordinator and Core Team members should *not* be mental health professionals.)

Mental Health Ministry Core Team Member Description and Qualifications

A Mental Health Ministry Core Team member is a volunteer position usually within a parish who will be responsible for:

- Living the mission of being Christ in the lives of others by educating, accompanying, and advocating in times of need.
- Connecting individuals and families to community resources as needed through their knowledge of community resources and how to access resources, for example through the Clinical Liaison at Catholic Charities, the [Catholic Charities Mental Health Ministries](#) webpage
- Adhering to parish and school Policy and Procedure for the Protection of Minors by maintaining up to date Safe Environment Training and Background Check.
- Attending meetings with their Parish Mental Health Ministry Coordinator

Qualifications and Skills

- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy.
- Core Team members may have a variety of gifts and talents. This is an aid and source of support for the Mental Health Ministry. Some helpful gifts and talents may include:
 - Organizational skills for planning events, including gathering resources, set up and tear down.

- A personal understanding of the impact of mental health and mental illness and passion for education, accompaniment, and advocacy.
- Self-awareness of one's needs, gifts, and limitations.
- Ability to navigate group dynamics and facilitate small group discussions.
- A spirit of welcome and hospitality; the ability to build trust and put people at ease.
- A healthy and balanced spirituality that is mindful of both the spiritual and the psychological dimensions of the human person.

Spiritual Support Group Guidelines

Mental Health Ministry Spiritual Support Group Meetings can be offered to support people who are living with a mental illness and to the caregivers, often parents, who are supporting a loved one who lives with a mental illness. It is important to realize that these are spiritual support meetings, not clinical support group meetings. Spiritual support groups provide spiritual and social support leading to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. At a spiritual support group meeting, participants are offered accompaniment to journey with others as they experience God (The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, 2024).

The vision of a Mental Health Ministry spiritual support group is to meet our brothers and sisters where they are and to accompany one another by creating pastoral environments in a designated space or room at a parish or school that is a safe space, a place of encounter for those experiencing challenges to gather and share their experiences and grow their relationship with God. A place for support groups, educational workshops, and opportunity for accompaniment.

General Guidelines

- Plan meeting agendas in advance with team leader and team members participating. It is recommended two facilitators be present. Meetings are for ages 18 years and up.
- Create a MHM Binder that contains: Mission Statement, Opening Statement, Calendar, and Prayers.
- You may choose a Patron Saint for the MHM. Suggestions are Saint Dymphna, Saint John of God, Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, Our Lady of Lourdes, Fatima, etc. Consider a small statue of the Patron Saint for the meetings.
- Open meetings with the lighting of a candle and prayer. Close meetings with petitions, prayer, and a blessing. After the opening prayer read the opening statement (See opening statement document).
- Address issues that come up in a timely manner. Discuss with the pastor and other members of the team as needed.
- Meeting regularly with team members to review progress, discuss changes, etc. Inform the Pastor, and/or Diocesan Mental Health Ministry Facilitator, of changes, recommendations, etc. as needed.
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Meeting Rules

1. This is a spiritual support group. It is not group therapy or mental health care.
2. All are welcome to share, no one is obligated.
3. We are here to support each other.

4. You are encouraged to describe what works for you, particularly in your spiritual life, but no advice.
5. No judging or interrupting.
6. No political discussions, religious debates, sexual discussions or gossiping.
7. Confidentiality - “What is said here stays here” and who is attending is kept confidential

For Core Team Members:

- Confidentiality is most important during a meeting. Need to stress that members of the group do not talk about other members outside of the group i.e., who is a member and what is discussed. Members must feel safe for them to speak openly.
- If someone says they will hurt themselves or others it must be reported. Learn the signs. Talk to them. If necessary, see that they get the appropriate help even if it means taking them to the hospital or calling 911.
- In sharing, members often discuss what is happening in their lives. Sometimes, they might stray from the agenda by discussing other topics, especially politics. When this occurs, gently move them back. Avoid getting caught up in extraneous topics and discussions. Ensure side conversations do not occur during the meeting.
- Members often make friends among the group to call, support or socialize outside of group meetings. If someone wants another member’s contact information have them speak directly to the member. Do not give out phone numbers or email addresses unless the member agrees to it.

Mental Health Ministry Meeting Opening Statement*

The Mental Health Ministry serves to support, encourage, and pray with and for people who live with mental illness. We come together to share our faith life and experiences with one another as we also seek to grow spiritually closer to our loving God.

We are people who strive to follow and imitate Jesus Christ in all we say and do. We are committed to what our Catholic Church believes and teaches about faith and morals in answer to our human search for truth and love and we are eager to share the good news of the Gospel. We offer prayer, spiritual support, and comfort in a group setting.

This meeting is not a group counseling or therapy session. We do not take on the roles of psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, or therapists. We do not provide diagnosis or prescribe

medications. If anyone is under the care of a doctor and/or taking medications, they need to continue doing so because this group is not a substitute for medical care or counseling.

Inappropriate or disruptive behavior, violence or abusive language is not permitted when participating in the group. If such an action occurs, the member may be asked to leave the group. During our meetings, we promise to respect one another by listening carefully to what is being said and by not carrying on side conversations.

We pledge ourselves to be open and honest in sharing information with one another. We promise to hold everything said in our meetings in strict confidence and will not share it with anyone outside of our group. The only exception is should anyone look to hurt either themselves or others, the team leader has a mandated obligation in accordance with the law to ensure that the member receives proper help and support.

*This opening statement is to be read after the opening prayer at the beginning of meetings where new members are present.

Sample Agenda for Mental Health Spiritual Support Group

- 1) Prior to meeting (15 Minutes)
 - a) Facilitator places the saint picture and/or other devotionals at the front of the room.
 - b) Facilitator places drinks on counter and turns on coffee (snacks for the break are not put out yet).
- 2) Opening Prayer (5 minutes)
 - a) Start with a short prayer and Our Father and Hail Mary.
 - b) Review Ground rules – have handouts available if needed.
 - c) Emphasize confidentiality and no dominating the conversation. Not therapy but spiritual support.
- 3) Round 1 - Brief introductions – If there is someone new to the group ask how they found out about the group. (5 to 10 minutes)
- 4) Round 2 - Sharing (30 to 40 minutes)
 - a) Go around and give each participant the opportunity to say how they are doing or allow them to pass.
 - b) Encourage supportive discussion – but not advice. Comments can be “When I had that issue this is what helped me;” Not “I think you should try this.”
- 5) Break (15 minutes) Put out snacks and social time.
- 6) Spiritual Reflection (30 minutes) - NOTE: This will be a primary responsibility of the facilitator – to regularly search for reliable resources that can be used.
 - a) Call attention to Saint picture and other devotionals.
 - b) Distribute Spiritual Reflection Resource. One of the following:

- i) Scripture reading with questions/comments to stimulate reflection.
 - ii) Gospel reading for the week.
 - iii) Reflection on a Church document on mental illness.
 - iv) Extended prayer such as the rosary or chaplet of divine mercy.
 - v) Other resources as discovered by Facilitator.
- 7) Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a) Prayer to a patron saint of mental health (such as St. Dymphna).
 - b) Distribute prayer notes and ask participants to write down any prayer intentions.
 - c) Put in prayer box.
 - d) Close with a short prayer and Our Father and Hail Mary (blessing if clergy is present).

Guidelines for Mental Health Crisis

What do I do when someone comes to me and may be suicidal?

Listen to them. Allow them to share their thoughts, feelings, and fears. This person came to you for a reason; let them talk. Be an active listener – nodding, responding by rephrasing what they say.

- Determine if they are suicidal. JUST ASK – be direct and talk openly. Asking about suicide does not encourage the person. It shows empathy and compassion.

Suicide Risk Assessment:

- Are you thinking about suicide? Or
- Are you thinking of killing yourself?

If yes, ASK about PLANNING

- Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?
- Have you done anything to get things you need to kill yourself?
- Have you decided when you would do it?

If the person is actively suicidal and has the means and a plan – do not leave them alone. Call 911. Let the dispatcher know that the person is at risk of suicide. Ask for a mental health crisis professional or crisis mobile team.

Be non-judgmental. Do not debate whether suicide is right or wrong, whether feelings are right or wrong. Listen, show support, and be empathic. Do not lecture.

Offer hope that help is available. Offer to pray with them.

If the person is not suicidal, but is distressed, listen to them.

Allow them to share their story, their feelings, and concerns with you privately.

Sometimes people just need to share with someone who they perceive as non-judgmental and who will not simply tell them what they need to do to solve their problem.

It is unlikely that you will know how to ‘fix’ the issue. Just being there for them can be hugely helpful.

Offer hope and reassure them that help is available. Offer to pray with them.

Help them connect with mental health resources – you can provide a list of crisis hotlines, counseling referrals or the contact information for the Clinical Liaison.

Stay in the know about what resources are in your community. Below are local resources on suicide prevention and other crisis needs.

- Allen County and surrounding counties:
 - Parkview SOS Mobile Intervention Team 260-373-7500
 - Parkview 24/7 Behavioral Health HelpLine 260-471-9440 or 800-284-8439.
 - Bowen Center (260) 471-3500
- DeKalb county:
 - Northeastern Center DeKalb County Outpatient – Auburn (260-925-2453)
 - Northeastern Center 24-hour emergency mental health solutions: 1-800-790-0118
- St. Joseph, Elkhart, and surrounding Counties:
 - Oaklawn Walk-in Crisis Centers (*bilingual services available)
 - 420 N. Niles Ave, Suite 100, South Bend, IN 46617 open 8am-8pm daily
 - 330 Lakeview Drive, entrance A, Goshen, IN 46528, open 8am-5pm Monday-Friday
 - 574-533-1234, option 1. Crisis centers offer a safe place to be quickly assessed, de-escalated, stabilized and linked to appropriate treatment. Walk-ins welcome!
 - Oaklawn mobile crisis response team 8am-8pm every day 574-533-1234
 - Youth and family team 1-8pm Monday through Friday
 - Oaklawn 24-hour crisis phone line 574-533-1234 24/7
- Online Resources
 - Remedy Live – Christian based Mental Health Chat Service Mental Health Online Resource and Listening Center (remedylive.com)
 - 988 Hotline – Call or Text
- National Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline (English, Spanish, and 200+ languages through interpretation services); Call: 800-799-7233; Text: BEGIN to 88788
- YWCA of North Central Indiana: Domestic violence 24/7 hotline: 866-937-9922
- YWCA of Northeast Indiana: Domestic violence 24/7 hotline: 800-441-4073
- Family Justice Center of St. Joseph County: 24/7 hotline: 574-289-4357
- Fort Wayne Center for Nonviolence: 260-456-4112

Resources for a Pastoral Response to Suicide

[The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers](#) is a great resource to learn about how to respond to suicide. The president of the association, Dcn. Ed Shoener, and Bishop John Dolan edited the book [Responding to Suicide: a Pastoral Handbook for Catholic Leaders](#) offering a guideline for how to provide spiritual support to those who have lost loved ones by suicide. Responding to suicide goes beyond making the necessary funeral arrangements.

In 2018, the bishops of California issued a pastoral letter titled [Hope and Healing](#) on caring for those who suffer from mental illness. They wrote:

Catholics must convey to them that we are not afraid to open this difficult conversation, that they need not feel ashamed to discuss their profound anguish and loss. While healing in these situations happens only very slowly, we must be willing to walk this long road with suicide survivors, to help console them without unconditional friendship and with sensitive pastoral care.

Let us remember that Christ's heart – a heart both human and divine – is merciful beyond measure.

Bishop John Dolan invites us to accompany our brothers and sisters who are survivors of suicide loss and who may struggle with daily psychological and spiritual desolation (Shoener & Dolan, 2020).

There are other Catholic resources that we can use to learn how to support those that have been affected by suicide.

- [When a Loved One Dies by Suicide](#) book and video series, edited by Bishop John Dolan and Deacon Ed Shoener
- [Bruised & Wounded: Struggling to Understand Suicide](#) by Fr. Ronald Rolheiser
- [After Suicide: Seven Things for Catholics to Know](#) by Fr. Ronald Rolheiser
- [After Suicide: There's Hope for Them and for You](#) by Fr. Chris Alar, MIC (available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and [pamphlet](#) form)

Legal and Ethical Issues in Mental Health Ministry

The Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend has outlined expectations for all clergy, pastoral counselors, volunteers and lay ministers. We are called to adhere to parish and school ***Policy and Procedure for the Protection of Minors*** by maintaining up to date **Safe Environment Training** and **Background Check**.

Timely referrals to Mental Health Professionals

Mental health ministers are not expected to treat mental health conditions but learn to recognize the signs and symptoms and have open conversations with the individual(s) who may benefit from a referral to professional mental health treatment. Keep a list of crisis resources, mental health professionals at hand or contact the Catholic Charities Clinical Liaison for a resource list of mental health professionals.

Mandated Reporting

Mandated Reporting: Mandated reporters are required by law, as defined by Ind. Code §31-33-5-1, to report all concerns of child abuse or neglect.

Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect 24/7 hotline: 1-800-800-5556

Indiana Endangered Adult State Hotline: 1-800-992-6978

Self-Care and Self-Compassion for Mental Health Ministers

Take some time to reflect on your wellness and ask for help if you need it. Asking for help is a strength. Setting healthy boundaries is important and necessary. Advocate for yourself and what you may need to help mitigate compassion fatigue and burnout. Your wellness is important and how you take care of yourself will determine how you minister to others. **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Mark 12:31

Important to consider:

- Grow in self-awareness and self-regulation of your emotions.
- Be empowered to manage yourself rather than trying to control others. Try to avoid using the word “should” in your ministry to others.
- Be trauma informed and culturally sensitive.
- Be intentionally attuned. Be mindful of when you may need to take a pause from volunteering in the ministry in order to take care of personal needs.

Mental Health Professionals

The Mental Health Ministers who hold active professional licenses should consider the legal and ethical boundaries set by their licensing agency to help limit the potential for dual relationships



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and confusion of the lay ministerial relationship on the part of the parishioner (Callahan, PhD et al., 2019). They will be supporting in ministry and not therapy when facilitating support groups or accompaniment.

Worship and Liturgy Resources

The realities of mental health issues and illnesses need to be recognized and incorporated into the liturgy and worship of the Church. In Mass and other worship services we can acknowledge that many parishioners are facing mental health challenges so that they understand that they are welcomed and supported by their parish community.

We can break down the stigma associated with mental health challenges by affirming during public worship services the important role that the Church has in ministering to people with mental health challenges.

We can do as Pope Francis has asked by remembering those who live with mental health challenges and, “pray for them and their families, so that they are never left alone, or discriminated against, but instead are welcomed and supported.” (Angelus on the Occasion of World Mental Health Day, Oct. 10, 2021)

A variety of worship and liturgy resources in English and Spanish are available on the [Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers website](#), including:

- Intercessions/Petitions for Mental Health
- Homilies on Mental Health and Illness
- World Day of the Sick Mass with Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick – February 11
- Saint Dymphna Mass, Novena, and Homily for Feast of St. Dymphna (May 15) and Mental Health Awareness Month (May)
- Suicide Healing and Remembrance Mass
- Longest Night/Blue Christmas (December 21) Prayer Service for those who are grieving, sad, or lonely during the holiday season

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has also created [Suggestions for Parish Engagement](#) as part of their National Mental Health Campaign, which includes suggestions for integrating the topic of mental health into the liturgy through prayers, blessings, and homilies.

Appendix A

Blessing and Commissioning of Mental Health Ministers

Commissioning of Mental Health Ministry Members from (Name of Parish / Diocese) (Would the Mental Health Ministry members present please join us here at the altar.)

Our parish /diocese has become part of the Catholic Mental Health Ministry Network. Mental Health Ministers work to eliminate the stigma and discrimination that people living with a mental illness encounter in the Church and in our society. Mental Health Ministers provide parish-wide education about mental illness so that we can turn our parish into a place where people are not afraid to talk about mental illness.

This morning (or afternoon or evening), we will commission the new Mental Health Ministry team members who will serve within our (parish /diocese). Mental Health Ministers serve as “prayerful companions” offering spiritual support to fellow parishioners experiencing mental illness to assist them to live in holiness. To the parents, family members and friends of people living with a mental illness, mental health ministers provide spiritual support in their efforts to care for and help their loved ones.

Mental Health Ministers do not take on the role of a psychologist, psychiatrist or therapist. They simply supply “Christian love, prayer and true human connections” – in other words, the “Catholic spiritual component” that is often left out in the treatment of mental illness.

I would like to introduce the ministry members here with us this morning (or afternoon or evening): (read names / parish), along with (read names / parish of those not present) who were not able to be with us. These (parish / diocesan) mental health ministry members will now be available to all those in our (parish / diocesan) family who have questions or concerns related to mental health. We are truly blessed to have this Mental Health Ministry Outreach join the other ministries serving within our parish / diocesan community.

BLESSING

God of all compassion,

You sent your Son into the world to proclaim the Good News of salvation and to heal those who were afflicted in any way. Through him you call your people to walk in newness of life and to care compassionately for those who are marginalized because of mental health conditions.

Bless our brothers and sisters, your servants, who have responded to the needs of our parish / diocese. Grant that they will receive with kindness all those who are experiencing mental health challenges as well as their loved ones. May their ministry among us of spiritual support and education dispel any stigma and be a sign of our care and compassion for all.

Strengthen them by your grace so that, in serving their brothers and sisters, they may serve Christ himself. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

On behalf of the entire (parish / diocese), I thank you all for helping to end the stigma that, to this day, surrounds mental health and for serving those in our (parish / diocese) with mental health challenges. Go and serve with Our Lord’s blessings.



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Appendix B

Support from USCCB and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

“Mental health ministry is essential to integral human development and a universal human right.” - Cardinal Michael Czerny, SJ, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; First Vatican Conference on Mental Health Ministry, January 2024

“The mental health crisis is a profound challenge to the church and to our society. We must respond with generosity, hope, and compassion to everyone who needs help. ... Individuals with mental illness and those facing mental health challenges are created in the image and likeness of God. They retain their God-given dignity. If you or a loved one is struggling with mental health, our message is clear. You are the treasure of the church. Jesus teaches ‘for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.’ To quote *Fratelli Tutti*, ‘In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan.’ [We] seek to respond to that call, and to follow in the compassionate footsteps of Jesus. Our service to our suffering brothers and sisters must be both pastoral and social.”

-Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, [Statement on the National Catholic Mental Health Campaign to the USCCB](#)

[A Future with Hope](#) by Bishop James Conley, his personal sharing of his own mental health journey, May 2024

[Members of One Body, Loved by One Love: Accompanying people in psychological distress in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (available in English, Spanish, Italian, and French)

Symptoms, such as depression, panic attacks and anxiety, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of interest and pleasure in doing things, excessive fears and worries, have affected many. ... What is particularly worrying is the surge in drug, alcohol and mainly online gambling abuse, not to mention episodes of aggression and especially domestic violence against the weakest and the helpless, and suicidal events or behaviors, such as suicides, attempted suicides and self-harm practices. ... In the “modern” culture, centered on the individual, this inner suffering is amplified by the fact that one must “get by alone”, without others. ... The challenge for ourselves, brothers and sisters of those who are desperate, is to hold ourselves in the discreet attitude of the angel who offers support, simple and delicate, to the brother or sister who no longer has the strength to live (Cf. 1 Kings 1-8).

The commitment to be a loving and healing presence, bearer of hope, embraces the WHOLE Church, as this cannot be exclusively “delegated” to specialists, such as hospital chaplains, social and healthcare professionals, religious congregations or specific associations. ... It is urgent to create spaces of welcome in our ecclesial communities, as well as counselling and accompaniment centers. It is an opportunity to involve many lay volunteers, who under the careful guidance of their pastors could be encouraged to offer their availability, time, healing and consoling presence. The accompaniment of sick persons must include their families. In fact, the whole family is affected by the events connected to illness, as this has major repercussions on family relationships, and in general on the balance of the family structure.

No matter the form of listening and accompaniment that we provide to suffering people, we cannot neglect prayer. Prayer sends a welcoming message and enables people to know that their communities are supporting them. Therefore, when possible, it is desirable to organize liturgical celebrations with mental

health sufferers, their families, social and healthcare workers, and mental health professionals, volunteers and all those who are an active part of the healing community that is the Church.

The pastoral accompaniment for mental health sufferers should be intertwined with the catechesis on the therapeutic and salvific power of the Church's sacraments that enable the encounter with Christ, "bodily and spiritual medicine..." to heal the contrite of heart. There are mainly two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance-Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. However, the healing grace par excellence that the Lord gave His Church is the Eucharist.

Today more than ever, we need the skills of experts in psychology, psychiatrists and social accompaniment. While respecting their specific expertise, dialogue enables all of a person's dimensions to be considered. The spiritual and psychological dimensions have many commonalities; we can and must encourage all the stakeholders to find common ground, in order to promote the well-being of those struggling in solitude. The painful conditions that many encounter during their existence, at times push them to the limit of their physical and mental strength. Only faithful friendship and fraternal closeness can offer them the uplifting and consoling "fresh water" of hope.