



Migration and Refugee Services

Renewing Hope. Seeking Justice.

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Hidden in Plain Sight: *A USCCCB/MRS Anti-trafficking Newsletter*

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Issue 9

Mental Health Awareness Month

During the month of May, we celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month, which originated in the United States in 1949 by **Mental Health America (MHA)**. Currently, several organizations come together to produce materials, resources, and information throughout the month of May. Organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (**NAMI**) focus on eradicating the

stigma, extending support, raising awareness, and advocating for policies that ensure the well-being of families.

This year, the National Campaign NAMI and other organizations such as Mental Health America, and other affiliates and organizations are celebrating is "Take the Moment" Campaign. Which encourages to fostering of open dialogues, cultivating empathy and understanding, extending resources to all, and supporting families. The **campaign** focuses *"on the importance of destigmatizing mental health by normalizing the practice of taking moments to prioritize mental health care without guilt or shame"*.

The goal of Mental Health Awareness Month is to raise awareness while educating the public about how pervasive mental illnesses are! The prevalence of data is as **follows**:

- 18.1% of Americans suffer from depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.
- An estimated 26% of Americans ages 18 and older, about 1 in 4 adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.
- Many people suffer from more than one mental disorder at any given time. In particular, depressive illnesses tend to co-occur with substance use behaviors and anxiety disorders.
- Most people who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental health disorder, most often being a depressive disorder or a substance use disorder.

NAMi has resources such as a toolkit, social media post ideas, hashtags and captions, and a database of graphics and activities on their [website](#).

Mental Health and Human Trafficking

Mental health issues can significantly increase an individual's susceptibility to victimization of trafficking, creating vulnerabilities that the trafficker will exploit for their own gain. Key factors can include a history of trauma, which can impair a person's ability to assess risk, recognize exploitation, and resist manipulation. Trauma survivors may struggle with issues such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), making them more susceptible to traffickers who promise validation, love, or a sense of belonging.



Additionally, mental illness can further compound vulnerabilities. They can affect judgment, decision-making, and the ability to maintain stable employment or relationships. Individuals grappling with mental health conditions may experience social isolation, financial instability, and a lack of support networks, all of which traffickers exploit to exert control. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding mental illness may deter survivors from seeking help or disclosing their experiences, leaving them even more vulnerable to exploitation.

Moreover, traffickers often target marginalized individuals who lack resources or social support, knowing that they are less likely to receive assistance or be believed if they attempt to escape. In this way mental health issues intersect with various risk factors for

trafficking, creating a vicious cycle of vulnerability and exploitation. By understanding and addressing the intersection of mental health and trafficking we can better protect vulnerable individuals and promote their well-being.

Recognizing Signs of Mental Illness

Recognizing signs of mental illness can vary depending on the specific condition, but here are some general indications that someone is experiencing mental health issues.

1. Changes in behavior: noticeable changes in behavior, such as withdrawal from social activities, increased irritability, mood swings, or unexplained outbursts.
2. Emotional instability: intense or prolonged feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, excessive worry, individuals may also experience mood fluctuations or difficulty controlling their emotions.
3. Changes in sleep patterns: insomnia or oversleeping, difficulty falling or staying asleep, or disruptions in sleep patterns that significantly impact daily functioning.
4. Changes in appetite or weight: significant changes in appetite, eating habits, or weight, which may manifest as eating too much or too little, or as a loss of interest in food.
5. Physical symptoms: physical complaints such as headaches stomachaches, muscle tension, or unexplained pains that do not have a medical cause.
6. Substance abuse: avoidance of social interactions, decreased interest in hobbies or activities previously enjoyed, or isolating oneself from friends and family.
7. Impaired functioning: decline in performance at work or school, neglecting responsibilities, or difficulty completing tasks due to mental health symptoms.
8. Suicidal thoughts or behaviors: expressing thoughts of self-harm, suicide, or engaging in self-destructive behaviors. This is a serious warning sign that requires immediate attention and intervention.

It is important to note that experiencing one or more of these symptoms does not necessarily mean someone has a mental health disorder. However, if these symptoms persist, interfere with daily life, or cause significant distress, it may be indicative of a mental health issue that requires professional evaluation and support. Encouraging open communication, offering support, and connecting individuals with mental health resources can be invaluable in promoting well-being and recovery.

Recognizing Signs of Abuse: A Crucial Step in Protecting Vulnerable Individuals

Recognizing signs of abuse is a critical aspect of safeguarding vulnerable individuals and facilitating timely intervention and support. Abuse can manifest in various forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, financial, and neglect, each leaving distinct indicators. By understanding these signs, individuals, communities, and professionals can play a pivotal role in addressing instances of abuse.

Physical abuse often leaves visible marks such as bruises, welts, burns, or fractures. These injuries may be explained away with excuses that don't align with the severity or frequency of the harm. Additionally, signs of neglect, such as poor hygiene or malnutrition, can signal the presence of abuse, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children. Recognizing these physical indicators requires keen observation and a willingness to question inconsistencies in explanations.

1. Emotional or psychological abuse, while less visible, can have profound and long-lasting effects on an individual's mental and emotional well-being. Victims may exhibit low self-esteem, withdrawal from social activities, or signs of depression and anxiety. They may express fearfulness or exhibit hypervigilance in their interactions. These subtle cues may hint at underlying emotional abuse, where the victim's sense of self-worth and agency is systemically undermined.
2. Sexual abuse can be particularly challenging to identify, as it often occurs behind closed doors and leaves fewer physical traces. Signs may include unexplained genital injuries or infections, fearfulness around certain individuals, or sudden changes in behavior or mood. Victims may exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior or knowledge beyond their age or developmental stage, signaling potential exposure to harmful experiences.
3. Financial abuse is another form that often goes unnoticed, yet it can have devastating consequences for victims' financial stability and autonomy. Signs may include sudden changes in financial status, such as depleted savings or unpaid bills, as well as a lack of access to personal finances or control over financial decisions. Exploitation may be evidenced by the unauthorized use of funds or coerced signatures on financial documents.
4. Neglect, whether intentional or unintentional, can also constitute abuse and requires attention to signs such as poor hygiene, inadequate living conditions, untreated medical conditions, or malnutrition. Particularly concerning the absence of necessary assistive devices or adaptations for individuals with disabilities, which can exacerbate vulnerability to harm.

It is important to acknowledge that recognizing signs of abuse requires a multifaceted approach that considers individual circumstances, cultural factors, and the dynamics of power and control. Not all signs may be immediately apparent, and some victims may actively conceal their experiences due to fear, shame, or manipulation by the abuser. Thus, creating safe and supportive environments where individuals feel empowered to disclose their experiences is essential.

In conclusion, recognizing signs of abuse is a crucial step in protecting vulnerable individuals and ensuring their safety and well-being. By remaining vigilant, informed, and compassionate, we can play an active role in identifying and addressing instances of abuse, advocating for survivors, and working towards creating communities where abuse is not tolerated. Only through collective awareness and action can build a society where everyone has the right to live free from harm and exploitation.

Saint Dymphna, Patron Saint of Mental Health

Saint Dymphna is revered as a patron saint of mental health, offering solace and intercession to those grappling with emotional distress, anxiety, and psychological challenges. Her story, resonates deeply with individuals facing mental health issues, drawing strength from her own experiences of trauma and resilience. Born in 7th-century Ireland, Dymphna's life took a tragic turn when she refused her mentally ill father's advances and fled with her confessor to escape an incestuous proposal. Despite her efforts to find sanctuary, Dymphna was eventually captured and martyred for her faith.

Dymphna's courageous stand against abuse and her unwavering commitment to her beliefs have made her a source of inspiration for many struggling with mental health issues today. Her legacy as a compassionate healer and protector resonates across religious boundaries, with people of various faiths seeking her intercession for comfort and healing.

Devotion to Saint Dymphna often takes the form of prayers, novenas, and visits to shrines dedicated to her. Many individuals turn to her in times of emotional turmoil, seeking strength, comfort, and hope in the face of mental illness. Through her example of resilience and faith, Dymphna continues to offer support and solace to those navigating the complexities of mental health.

As we honor Saint Dymphna during Mental Health Awareness Month and beyond, let us draw inspiration from her example of courage and compassion. May her intercession bring comfort to those facing mental health challenges and remind us of the importance of empathy, understanding, and support for all who struggle with mental illness.

A prayer to Saint Dymphna

Good Saint Dymphna, great wonderworker in every affliction of mind and body, I humbly implore your powerful intercession with Jesus through Mary, the Health of the Sick, in the present need of everyone afflicted by mental health. Saint Dymphna, martyr of purity, patroness of those who suffer with nervous and mental afflictions, beloved child of Jesus and Mary, pray to Them for me and obtain my request.

(Pray one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Glory Be.)

Saint Dymphna, Virgin and Martyr, pray for us.

Monthly Event: Prayer Service

USCCB/MRS has launched a St. Josephine Bakhita Working Group - a team of individuals who meet monthly to discuss and plan strategies related to different topics and issues pertaining to human trafficking.

For the month of May, as Easter continues we will discuss and pray for victims of Trafficking at Sea.

Maritime trafficking is modern slavery at sea, a violation of the human dignity of laborers at all stages of the seafood supply chain and aquaculture industries.

The virtually unregulated fishing industry in many countries, coupled with the global demand for cheap seafood, creates the lawless conditions under which trafficking at sea flourishes. Victims are often exposed to extreme climactic conditions with no protective gear and are forced to work long hours with little rest. The price of non-compliance can be brutal beatings, and often death.

We will be praying for the victims of the Baltimore Francis Scott Key Birdge Collapse.

Each month we will use the same Zoom link:
<https://usccb.zoom.us/j/84353639216>

May 8th Prayer Service



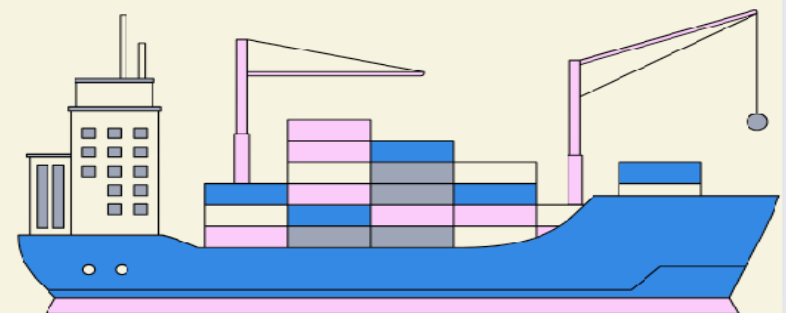
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We will be praying for the victims of the Baltimore **Francis Scott Key Birdge Collapse**.

**May 8th, 2024
2:00PM EST**

Zoom Link



Get to Know Our Intern!



Hello everyone,
I'm Bernice Tamukong, and I'm thrilled to be interning at USCCB/MRS as a first-year clinical social work student! Through my work, I bring a blend of experiences and a passion for making a difference. When I'm not buried in textbooks, you can catch me at my local salsa class or coaching African dance at high schools across Prince George County. I am committed to empowering and uplifting vulnerable individuals, and communities, which led me to pursue my master's in social work at The Catholic University of America.

Fun fact: I was born in the capital of Cameroon in Africa, Yaoundé.

April! What a Month!

During the month of April, we engaged in many in-person events, here is a highlight of them both:

Responding to Changing Realities at the U.S. Border and Beyond The conference, **"Responding to Changing Realities at the U.S. Border and Beyond,"**

jointly hosted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and The Catholic University of America, highlighted the values of compassion, justice, and solidarity in addressing immigration challenges. With a focus on understanding the roots and dimensions of the Catholic responses to immigration crises and reform, this event called Catholics back to Catholic social justice teachings. By celebrating the installation of the Angels Unawares sculpture and highlighting the impactful work of students and alumni in immigration and refugee advocacy, the organizers underscore the Catholic imperative to welcome and embrace migrants and refugees.



The 2024 Maryland Crime Victims' Rights Conference

The 2024 Maryland Crime Victims' Rights Conference, offered a crucial platform for individuals, advocates, and experts to convene and delve into pressing issues concerning victims of crime. Among the significant topics to be addressed, the conference provided a comprehensive exploration of support systems for victims of sexual violence, human trafficking, and hate crimes. Attendees had the opportunity to gain insights from leading professionals and survivors themselves, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges faced by those affected by these crimes and the resources available to support them. Through engaging workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, participants deepened their understanding of trauma-informed care, legal rights, and innovative approaches to advocacy.

New Resource!

St. Josephine Bakhita



A Prayer to St. Josephine Bakhita

St. Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured untold hardship and suffering.

Once liberated from your physical enslavement, you found proper redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church.

O St. Bakhita, assist all those trapped in a state of slavery; Intercede with God on their behalf so that they will be released from their chains of captivity. Those whom man enslaves, let God set free.

Provide comfort to survivors of slavery and let them look to you as an example of hope and faith. Help all survivors find healing from their wounds. We ask for your prayers and intercessions for those enslaved among us.


Amen.



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<http://www.usccb.org/stopslavery>

We are thrilled to announce that we have a new St. Bakhita prayer card! **Amy Heyse** painted the beautiful piece of art that graces the front. Although we cannot print to order, we can share with you a PDF version of the prayer card.

We also have the prayer card available in Spanish. For more information, please email fonetti@usccb.org



If you want to learn more about the USCCB/MRS'
Anti-Trafficking Program, reach out to:

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