

MENTAL ILLNESS WITH GRACE

FIVE PART SERIES ON MENTAL ILLNESS

AWARENESS – ACCEPTANCE- ACCOMPANIMENT

CREATING A SAFE PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WILL FEEL COMFORTABLE IN SHARING THEIR STORY AND BE SUPPORTED IN THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Awareness: The series will create mental illness awareness in parishes/deanery grouping of parishes through a series of presentations on mental health issues. One in 4 people deal with a mental illness in any given year and for 1 in 22 it will be serious and persistent. Everyone who experiences a mental illness has family and friends who often are in search of how to help their loved ones. Therefore, in any parish there is a high percentage of parishioners affected by these issues. It is recognized by many professionals in the mental health field that spirituality is a key component of recovery. (See the American Psychiatric Association booklet “Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders.”) Parish mental illness ministries can reduce stigma that causes isolation, while providing a sense of God’s comfort and care that helps in the recovery process. (See California Bishops Statement “Hope and Healing” on role of Church.)

Acceptance: The series will foster acceptance of people with mental illness and their families and reduce the stigma of these illnesses through education and factual information about mental health conditions. The series reinforces our Catholic core belief that everyone has dignity and everyone has value. Inclusion in our parishes is not only desirable, it is necessary for the parish to fully experience the image of God’s kingdom. (See article “A Community of Faith is like a Stained Glass Window”)

Accompaniment: The series provides models for journeying in faith with people with mental illness and families. It will demonstrate how a faith community can offer concrete support for people who often feel isolated and alone.

Desired Outcome

The outcome of the initial 5 meetings on mental illness would be to form a mental health team that would consider how to minister and accompany

people and families dealing with mental illness. This could include the following:

- One or more of additional presentations or trainings
- Group discussions
- Support groups – See our webpage on starting a support group
- Resource teams that can be guides to services in the community

Format for Series on Mental Illness

The meetings provide information as well as opportunity for discussion. For many, the discussion part will be the first time they have been able to openly share their experience. The opening question (see below) is an integral part of building awareness and the knowledge that we are not alone. The question is shared in small groups, 3 to 5. In the small groups, each person should be given a chance to share without crosstalk or problem solving. Then each group shares something from their discussion with the larger group.

Place handouts, sign-in sheet, and name tags on a table at entrance

Meeting time approximations:

Prayer – 5 minutes

Opening Question and Discussion – 30 minutes

Presentation - 40 minutes

Q and A – 10 minutes

Closing Prayer - 5 minutes

INITIAL STEPS

Establish a parish that will host the series of talks with approval of the pastor and staff. Invite surrounding parishes for active participation in organizing and publicizing the meetings.

From the parishes seek a group of leaders that will help put the series together and form the team. Ideally clergy, lay leaders, people with mental illnesses, family members, and professionals will be part of the team. However, experience has proven that a few people with a passion for this ministry can build the ministry.

Prior to the first meeting:

- Have 4 Bulletin Articles leading up to first meeting in all participating parishes. See Samples.
- The pastor should introduce the bulletin articles with a letter in the bulletin supporting this ministry.
- Announcement in Church before the first meeting. Ideally homilies will reinforce the need.
- What is the timing of these meetings, i.e. weekly, bi-weekly, etc.? Nights? Weekends?

INITIAL SERIES OF 5 MEETINGS

- Each meeting is 1 ½ hours long
- Start on time and end on time
- Have handouts for each meeting that support that night's topic
- After each meeting have a short wrap-up meeting with the team

First Night – Impact of Mental Illness on Individual and Families

Opening Prayer

Introduction to the series (Pastor or Staff)

Icebreaker for small group discussion – “What was your first experience of a person with a mental illness? How did it make you feel?”

Wrap-up of small discussion groups inviting summary responses to the questions.

Speaker: A team member (Most the overview can be researched at NAMI.org)

Speaker Topic: Impact of Mental Illness on Individuals and Families

- Overview of mental illness
 - How common
 - Severity range of illnesses
 - Where are people with mental illnesses
 - Living at home
 - Living on their own
 - Working / unable to work full time
 - State and private facilities
 - Homeless
 - In prisons and jails
- Invite family member and a person with a mental illness to witness their experience
- How has the above person's faith helped them

Closing Prayer

Second Night – Spend an Evening with a Mental Health Professional

Opening Prayer

Icebreaker for small group discussion: "Why are you here tonight?"
What would you like to learn?"

Wrap-up of small discussion groups inviting summary responses to the questions.

Speaker: Psychiatrist/Therapist

Speaker Topic: What are types of mental illnesses, medications, treatment, and issues that parishes need to be aware of? How from a professional perspective can parishioners be supportive to people with a mental illness and their families?

Closing Prayer

Third Night- Ministry to People With Mental Illness and Their Families

Opening Prayer

Icebreaker for small group discussion: “How have you found support for any difficult times you have experienced?”

Wrap-up of small discussion groups inviting summary responses to the questions.

Speaker: Person who is in this ministry

Speaker Topic: Ministry to people with mental illness and their families

- Awareness - Creating welcoming environments
- Acceptance – people with dignity and value; person not an illness
- Accompaniment – journey in Faith together, learn from one another

Closing Prayer

Fourth Night – Spirituality And Mental Illness

Opening Prayer

Icebreaker for small group discussion: “What does Spirituality mean for you?”

Wrap-up of small discussion groups inviting summary responses to the questions.

Speaker: Spiritual Director who ministers in the field of mental illness

Speaker Topic: Spirituality and Mental Illness

- Healing involves mind body and soul

- How does our faith nourish us
 - Sacramental life of the Church
 - Devotional practices
 - Prayer and meditation

Closing Prayer

Fifth Night-How Can We Minister To People With A Mental Illness And Their Families

Opening Prayer

Icebreaker for small group discussion: “How have you found or are you aware of the mental health resources in the community “

Wrap-up of small discussion groups inviting summary responses to the questions.

Speaker: Local service providers (Have tables with their materials for people to take home)

Speaker Topic: Where are area community Mental Health Resources

- Speakers from mental health service providers
- How do we access services?
 - insurance
 - no insurance
- How can we partner with service providers?

Speaker: from the Team

Speaker Topic: Where do we go from here?

- Handout a survey

- What are the needs of the attendees?
- Form a mental health team – what will it do?
- Start a support group for people with a mental illness or families or both
- Additional information night
- Training – mental health first aid

Closing Prayer