

# A Future with Hope

## Introduction

Our world is experiencing a mental health crisis. Anxiety and depression weigh heavily on the lives of many people – often those people are youth and young adults. There is hope, though. I speak from experience. I have been on my own mental health journey that has taken me to the depths of darkness and then back to a life in which I once again experience joy and an even deeper love for our Lord. In this pastoral letter, *A Future with Hope*, I share my story, some practical advice, and a Catholic context for mental health to encourage you on your own unique journey to wholeness and holiness. Whether you're one of the nearly 60 million Americans who have experienced some form of mental illness<sup>1</sup> or a loved one of someone struggling, you don't have to suffer alone. Jesus yearns to walk with you, and He offers a peace and hope this world cannot give. I pray sharing my journey will help you with your journey.

## Part I: My Story of Pursuing Mental Health

Since my conversion to the Catholic Church in college, I have always known intellectually of my total dependence on God, recognizing this as a defining feature of the human condition. I certainly believed Jesus' words, "Apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5), but this truth became twisted with a lie. I had been raised according to the common American stereotype of the self-made man who pulls himself up by the bootstraps and solves every problem himself. When things aren't going well, he doesn't show weakness, he just works harder. As a Christian, I adapted this to: he prays and he works harder. God offers grace but, with that aid, I mistakenly thought I had to do the rest. Such ungodly self-reliance inevitably led to my unraveling.

About seven years after becoming bishop of Lincoln I started buckling under my episcopal duties. The people of this diocese have a beautiful faith, and I wanted to be the strong, invincible leader I thought they deserved. Day in and day out, I tried to fix the problems brought to me instead of *surrendering* them to the Lord. There was always more work than time, and gradually I slacked in taking care of my own physical and mental well-being. The first thing to go was my sleep because my brain would run nonstop. All night I would lie in bed rehashing the day's events, wrongly believing everything depended on me, that I was responsible for all the outcomes in the diocese. Although the wear and tear of this lifestyle was taking its toll, I kept trying to muscle through. As my body began to break down from lack of sleep and stress, I ate irregularly or not at all. I'm a runner, and typically ran two half-marathons a year, but by 2020 I had to stop due to a lack of energy. My physical deterioration led to emotional and psychological decline and, before I knew it, I was barely holding onto the last thread of my spiritual health.

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<sup>1</sup> "Mental Health By the Numbers," NAMI, updated April 2023, <https://www.nami.org/about-mental-illness/mental-health-by-the-numbers>.

In retrospect I can see that shame undermined the Holy Spirit's impulses to tend to my physical and mental health. I had no family history of mental health disorders, had been raised by loving parents, and was blessed with close friends and meaningful work—surely, I couldn't be suffering from mental health issues! After eventually being medically diagnosed with PTSD, major depression, anxiety, and tinnitus, I was forced to confront my denial. But even then, I didn't think a bishop could take time off to deal with personal issues. Maybe a leave of absence was acceptable in the case of physical sickness, but not for mental health issues. Even though I was barely functioning and at the end of my rope, I still minimized my problems.

Thankfully, my sister, friends, and medical professionals helped me recognize that it wasn't selfish to take care of myself. When Jesus commands, "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*" (Matthew 22:39, emphasis added), most of us hear a call to love others well. This is certainly true, but it is also a command to rightly ordered self-love.<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas explains that we must love ourselves—and we are free to choose whether to do it well or poorly.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, our self-love informs our ability to love others for "man's love for himself is the model of his love for another."<sup>4</sup> I had drifted away from the Church's teaching that since we are body and soul, taking care of our physical and mental health is part of God's plan for our lives. And this lack of self-love was now hindering my ability to love and serve well.

In December of 2019, through the kindness and understanding of the apostolic nuncio to the United States, I was granted permission by the Holy Father to take a leave of absence to attend to my mental health. It was extremely hard to step away from my duties as bishop, especially without a set timetable for my return. It was humbling to admit that I didn't know how long my healing would take—or if I would even return—and I wanted to be honest with my flock about why I was leaving. The cultural stigma around mental health issues can create pressure to hide our struggles. I decided to combat prejudice and my shame by sharing my suffering openly. The outpouring of support and prayer I received from the good people of the Diocese of Lincoln was beyond what I could've imagined. I would need all that grace since the hardest part of my journey was still ahead.

### **In Recovery**

Covid-19 exploded across the world a few months after I moved into a diocesan retreat facility in Phoenix at Bishop Thomas Olmsted's generous invitation. As I like to say, I took a leave of absence from my diocese in December for health reasons, and then in March the whole world took a leave of absence due to Covid-19. The added isolation of the pandemic, the challenging work of mental and physical healing, and a spiritual dryness combined to create one of the darkest periods of my life. Looking back on those months, perhaps the worst part of that time in my life was the loss of joy. Anyone who knew me, knew that I was always a positive, upbeat

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<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between a rightly ordered love of self, which is good and healthy, and an inordinate love of self, which leads to sin. In his words, "Well ordered self-love, whereby man desires a fitting good for himself, is right and natural; but it is inordinate self-love, leading to contempt of God, that Augustine reckons to be the cause of sin" (*Summa Theologiae* II-I, Q. 77, A. 4, ad 1).

<sup>3</sup> "Love of self is common to all" (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 25, A. 7, co).

<sup>4</sup> See *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 26, A. 4, co.

kind of person. My temperament never tended toward melancholy, and I was forever optimistic about life. All of that utterly disappeared as my joy evaporated.

Feeling like I had lost nearly everything, I clung to my three anchors: Holy Mass, the Rosary, and the Liturgy of the Hours (the official prayers of the Church that priests and religious promise to recite daily). These three anchors gave structure to my day but offered little solace. Since Mass could not be publicly celebrated for several months, it was difficult to drag myself to the chapel, a mere five-minute walk from my residence, to offer Mass privately. There were even a few days where I couldn't manage it. On the majority of days when I did fulfill my commitments, the anchors often felt like a chore, with no sense of the Lord's presence. But I knew that to let go of Holy Mass, the Rosary, and the Liturgy of the Hours would unmoor me. During this time my Breviary (which contains the prayers of the Liturgy of Hours) occasionally consoled me because the heart cries of the psalms resonated. The psalms slowly became more important to me than ever before. Strange as it may seem, one verse from Friday Night Prayer, "My one companion is darkness" (Psalm 88:18), became a comforting reminder that others had experienced darkness for a season and found their way back into the light. But that solace always faded, and I couldn't help wondering: Where was God?

As I grappled with this question amid the darkness and loss of joy, the moon in the desert sky became a powerful symbol to me. Because the moon waxes and wanes, there are a few days in the lunar cycle when it disappears from view. It is still there, of course, but the naked eye can't see it. It is the same with God. Even when I can't see, hear, or feel Him, He is still there.

It was during this period of darkness that Jesus' words, "Apart from me, you can do nothing," began to take on deeper meaning. As I more fully embraced the Lord as healer and teacher, I learned more about my radical dependence on Him. I started to experience the freedom of surrender as I gradually allowed Jesus to shoulder burdens I had been carrying on my own. It was about this time I began praying the "Surrender Novena," a prayer by Fr. Dolindo Ruotolo daily. Slowly but surely, this began to bear fruit.

I realized that my mental image of being sent out by Jesus like the Apostles (see Mark 6:7) seemed to suggest that the Lord stayed behind. As I prayed through this image, I started to notice other verses that corrected this erroneous view, such as, "And they went forth and preached everywhere, while *the Lord worked with them*" (Mark 16:20, emphasis added) and, "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Understanding my role as a collaboration with Jesus in His work became quite liberating and a turning point for my unhealthy self-reliance. As my therapist would often remind me, all you have to do is "show up," and the Lord will do the rest.

This also helped me open to more support from friends. There were several young families living in Phoenix, former students of mine during my years as chaplain at the University of Dallas' Rome campus, who opened their homes to me. One family in particular became like a second family to me. It was therapeutic to spend time with their children and to grill and chat outside in their backyard. It also gave me a sense of purpose to say Mass privately for them

since, like so many other faithful Catholics in this trying period, they were starved for the Eucharist. I played golf with other friends in Phoenix, and over the course of those months my sister, some close lay friends, and a handful of my brother bishops even flew to Phoenix to spend a few days with me. All this love and support helped get me out of my own head, out of the house, and out of isolation. So many friends initiating reconnection in the spring and summer of 2020 and then ensuring we stayed connected was pivotal in my recovery.

The last gift of this difficult healing season was my dog, Stella. My good friend Bishop James Wall of Gallup was in the process of getting a puppy and he convinced me to do likewise. We took a seven and a half hour road trip to El Paso to pick up four eight-week-old golden retrievers, two for us and two for other friends. Looking back it's funny to think that a ten pound puppy was crucial in beginning to bring joy back into my life. Stella goes nearly everywhere with me now and is loved by all. Since I live alone, she provides needed companionship and ensures I get outside every day for walks.

After shadowing Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, my closest friend of over 50 years, and Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, I was ready to resume my episcopal duties in November 2020. Since most things had been put on hold because of Covid, I returned to many of the same issues that were pending when I left. These challenges were heightened by my mom's passing on December 19, which was particularly hard because we were so close. Although my return to "normal" life was bumpy, I was intentional about prioritizing physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. For instance, in 2021 I was blessed to join three other bishops for a Healing the Whole Person retreat sponsored by the John Paul II Healing Center. Led by an incredible team, it was a time of intense healing and camaraderie. In fact, we still do a monthly check-in with our team to support each other. I also recently finished a three-year spirituality program for bishops sponsored by the Institute for Priestly Formation, which helped solidify my recovery and growth.

My journey toward greater wholeness and holiness will continue, but I am immensely grateful for the additional freedom and peace I have now. I am also no longer on any medication, which at one time seemed an impossibility. I share my own story in the hopes that it will hasten the demise of the mental health stigma in our culture. I also pray it will inspire others to embrace Jesus as the Divine Physician and experience more fully "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

## **Part II: Pursuing Mental Health**

I am obviously not a mental health professional. I offer these pastoral reflections based on my knowledge of Church teaching and experiences of healing. Further resources are suggested below.

### **Seeking Wholeness and Holiness**

It is “only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7) and, in cooperating with His grace, we can all move closer to wholeness and holiness. I’d like to highlight a few ways we can go about this work.

*Seek healing from Jesus directly.* The Gospels emphasize Jesus’ healing ministry, and His healing work continues! We should always go first to the Lord to ask for physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. While there are some who receive instantaneous and miraculous healings (and it’s good to ask for this), the Lord may choose to heal us gradually or even to permit the suffering to continue. No matter what, we can be at peace trusting that He gives us what we need and is working everything for good.

In addition to regular prayer, the sacraments are a crucial part of every Catholic’s healing journey because through them we directly receive a share in divine life. Or, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “Sacraments are ‘powers that come forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving” (CCC 1116). Simply put: when we encounter God in the sacraments, free from mortal sin and with an open heart, we are transformed. And how could it be otherwise when God gives us Himself?

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, the God who healed lepers, the blind, the sick, and the lame literally unites Himself with us! So deeply, in fact, that St. Cyril of Alexandria said, “He who communicates [receives the Eucharist] unites himself as closely to Jesus Christ as two pieces of wax, when melted, become one.”<sup>5</sup> We should approach this union with expectant faith, as the very words of the Mass encourage us: “Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof, but only say the word and *my soul shall be healed.*” This is an adaption of a passage from St. Matthew’s Gospel where a Roman soldier asks Jesus to heal his servant’s physical ailment: “The centurion responded, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed’” (Matthew 8:8). Whatever kind of healing we desire, we can bring it to Jesus in the Eucharist and trust that He is at work.<sup>6</sup>

The other sacrament we should regularly receive on our journey is the sacrament of Penance—one of the two “sacraments of healing” (CCC 1421). Even if our personal sin is unconnected to our ailment, confession strengthens us on our earthly pilgrimage and can impart many consolations, including peace and a sense of God’s love. In instances where our sin is a driving factor in our distress, we can turn to the sacrament of Penance for freedom from the weight of our sin. The sacrament also aids our quest for mental health by showering us with particular graces to combat the sins we confess. This is an irreplaceable gift in our journey toward virtue and wholeness.

When we have sought holiness for any length of time, we inevitably seem to experience a lack of progress with particular sins, despite considerable effort. Instead of allowing the cycle of

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<sup>5</sup> Fr. Michael Müller, *The Blessed Eucharist: Our Greatest Treasure* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1994), p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> See John 5:17: “But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’”

repeated sin and confession to sap our mental health, we can follow St. Thomas Aquinas in recognizing that sin as “an occasion for humility and greater caution.”<sup>7</sup> To avoid becoming discouraged, we can thank God for another reminder of our total dependence on Him, lean into the opportunity for humility, and begin again.

*Seek healing from Jesus indirectly.* The Church offers other opportunities for healing beyond the sacraments, such as healing services and prayer teams. I am familiar with some miraculous healings that have happened through similar avenues and encourage priests and lay people alike to offer them in their local communities. Additionally, the Church urges us to seek the intercession of the saints who, now in Heaven, are our most powerful intercessors. We are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), and stories abound of miraculous healings through the intercession of the saints.

I am especially close to St. Joseph because I was born on his feast day (March 19). At the retreat center in Phoenix there was a marble statue of a middle-aged St. Joseph embracing a young Jesus. Each morning the first thing I saw outside the window was this patron of the Universal Church, appearing so strong and steady. The statue served as a daily reminder that St. Joseph was a good foster father, encouraging me to take my recovery one day at a time—or, when that felt too overwhelming, just one step at a time. St. Joseph is someone who quietly “showed up” every day. Feeling my acute need for his help in this difficult season, I consecrated myself to St. Joseph using Fr. Donald Calloway’s excellent book, *Consecration to St. Joseph*. This great saint’s assistance was so palpable that in 2021 I consecrated the entire Diocese of Lincoln to him. I can’t encourage you enough to personally consecrate yourself to St. Joseph and experience firsthand the benefits of his powerful intercession. As St. Teresa of Avila wrote of “the glorious St. Joseph” in her autobiography, “Would that I could persuade all men to be devout to this glorious Saint; for I know by long experience what blessings he can obtain for us from God. I have never known anyone who was really devout to him, and who honored him by particular services, who did not visibly grow more and more in virtue; for he helps in a special way those souls who commend themselves to him.”<sup>8</sup> St. Joseph played an important role in my recovery, and he wants to support yours too.

During my leave of absence, I also met regularly with a psychologist, medical doctor, and spiritual director, as well as a trusted psychiatrist. These people were not only experts in their fields, but were true disciples of Jesus. They all played crucial, though different, roles in my healing. While recognizing that your access to such support may be limited, I encourage you to seek help via whatever means are available to you. Additionally, there is something immensely healing about a loving community. We are communal creatures and, since many wounds are relational, much healing can be found through safe and loving relationships. Trust and let the people who love you help. If you don’t have this kind of support, pray for these relationships. It

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<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, q. 3, a. 13, reply to objections.

<sup>8</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, Chapter 6, #11, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8120/8120-h/8120-h.htm#l6.0>.

is a deep sorrow to be without them, but the Lord always provides on His own timetable and in His own creative ways.

*Seek healing through balance.* Mental health issues can be created or exacerbated (as they were for me) if we don't care for all the dimensions of our life—body, mind, and soul. Making time for sleep, healthy eating, exercise, and recreation is important not just for mood stabilization but for fostering an overall sense of well-being and joy. When we are struggling, these are foundational building blocks we can put in place or improve upon.

### **The Catholic Context for Mental Health**

One might rightly ask, if we don't speak of a Catholic physics or a Catholic biology, why do we need a Catholic understanding of mental health? The answer is because any notion of mental health is laden with beliefs about the human person, about true human anthropology. After all, if mental health refers to “a person's cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being,”<sup>9</sup> we must know what well-being means and what well-being looks like. But notions of human flourishing depend on one's beliefs about the human person's origins, purpose, and destiny. And so, a Catholic view of mental health is necessary because it defines well-being according to reason and revelation.

The well-being we were made for is nothing less than the goodness found in Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council teaches very beautifully that “Christ, the final Adam, by the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”<sup>10</sup> And the *Catechism* explains, “In all of his life Jesus presents himself as *our model*. He is ‘the perfect man’, who invites us to become his disciples and follow him” (CCC 520). God the Son became human, like us in every way,<sup>11</sup> and his holiness and wholeness provide the ideal toward which we strive as Christians. When Catholics seek cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being, we pursue thoughts that are captive to Christ (the head piece),<sup>12</sup> actions that are in keeping with the Gospel (the choice piece),<sup>13</sup> and the peace that surpasses all understanding (the heart piece).<sup>14</sup>

If in the end we seek to be like Christ, then how do we get there? Since Jesus is the perfect human, it makes sense to begin with an understanding of the human person. All of us are made in the image and likeness of God, a unity of body and soul (see CCC 362–365). In fact, the two are so closely united that our body affects our souls (for example, when a delicious meal raises

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<sup>9</sup> “What is mental health?” January 29, 2022, *Medical News Today*, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/154543#summary>

<sup>10</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> See Hebrews 2:17: “Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people.”

<sup>12</sup> See 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

<sup>13</sup> See Philippians 1:27a: “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

<sup>14</sup> See Philippians 4:6: “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

our spirits) and vice versa (for example, when the joy of a friend’s wedding causes bodily elation). Typically, we have a tendency to take care of one and neglect the other but, as St. John Paul II noted, the *whole* person, “not only his spiritual soul with intelligence and free will, but also his body shares in the dignity of the ‘image of God.’”<sup>15</sup> Both body and soul must be attended to, for we reflect and glorify God through both. In this understanding of the human person, we can see how issues in body or soul potentially harm mental health. For instance, current research indicates how family history of depression or certain diets are correlated with increased likelihood of depression and anxiety.<sup>16</sup> So too with the soul, major life changes such as the loss of a loved one or unemployment can impact mental health.<sup>17</sup> Other studies show how increased social media use is correlated with less and poorer sleep as well as higher rates of depression.<sup>18</sup>

A different but complementary perspective views the human person as having an intellect to know the good, a will to choose it, and emotions that encourage movement toward the good and away from evil (see CCC 356, 1705, 1763). This conception nicely mirrors the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional aspects of well-being and highlights their interconnectedness. For instance, we might have the idea to go to Adoration (the cognitive), decide to act on it by going to spend time with the Lord (the behavioral), and leave the chapel feeling more uplifted (the emotional). Or on the flipside, if we engage in negative self-talk (the cognitive) this could generate feelings of sadness or worthlessness (the emotional) that we might choose to numb with alcohol, television, or our phones (the behavioral).

There are many factors that affect our mental health, and some of them are beyond our control (for instance, genetics, brain chemistry, traumatic events, poverty, racism, etc.). Without minimizing these impacts—which can be substantial—it remains true that we always have a choice about how to respond. Whatever your situation, I encourage you to join in the movement within the Church to prioritize mental health and seek healing.

## You Are Not Alone

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<sup>15</sup> St. John Paul II, “Address to the Participants at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Healthcare Workers Organized by the Pontifical Council of Pastoral Care,” November 30, 1994, #3, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1996/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19961130\\_pc-hlthwork.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1996/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19961130_pc-hlthwork.html).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Douglas F. Levinson and Walter E. Nichols, “Major Depression and Genetics,” Stanford Medicine, <https://med.stanford.edu/depressiongenetics/mddandgenes.html>; TS Rao, et al, “Understanding nutrition, depression and mental illnesses,” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, April 2008, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2738337/>; Tina Ljungberg, et al, “Evidence of the Importance of Dietary Habits Regarding Depressive Symptoms and Depression,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Mar 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7084175>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Pål Kristensen, “Bereavement and Mental Health after Sudden and Violent Losses: A Review,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, Spring 2012, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22397543/>; MW Linn, et al, “Effects of unemployment on mental and physical health” *American Journal of Public Health*, May 1985, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1646287/>.

<sup>18</sup> “The Social Dilemma: Social Media and Your Mental Health,” McClean Hospital, March 29, 2024, <https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/it-or-not-social-medias-affecting-your-mental-health>.

What we can be always sure of—no matter what is happening in our lives—is that we are not alone. *You* are not alone! God knows your suffering intimately and wants to walk with you through it. As St. John Paul II wrote, “Christ took upon Himself all human suffering, even mental distress. Yes, even this suffering, which appears perhaps to be the most absurd and incomprehensible, configures the sick person to Christ and makes him share in his redemptive passion.”<sup>19</sup> In this moment, as in every moment, God is whispering to you, “I know the plans I have for you...plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

The hope God gives us and the joy that accompanies this hope, is a precious treasure we must protect. When hope wanes, let us remember the countless ways God has blessed us, the particular instances in our lives where He has “come through,” and the dark times when He felt absent but, in hindsight, we could discern His presence. Reading the lives of the saints is also a powerful way to remember that God is active in every life at all times in history. How comforting to know many saints struggled like us—St. Ignatius of Loyola contemplated suicide,<sup>20</sup> St. Jane Frances de Chantal suffered from depression for over forty years,<sup>21</sup> St. John of God had a mental breakdown that resulted in hospitalization,<sup>22</sup> and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton struggled with anxiety and depression.<sup>23</sup> They all grew closer to God through their struggles and so can we.

I would like to close with a simple practice, adapted from St. Francis de Sales, a Bishop and Doctor of the Church, as well as a staunch advocate of the universal call to holiness. Throughout the day, before beginning various tasks, let us do three things: acknowledge, offer, and accept.<sup>24</sup> 1) Acknowledge that the Lord is with us and, if needed, ask for His help; 2) Offer whatever we are about to do up to Him and place it in His hands; 3) Resolve to accept whatever

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<sup>19</sup> St. John Paul II, Speech to the Participants of the XI International Conference for Health Care Workers, November 30, 1994, #7, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/mentally-ill-are-also-made-in-gods-image-8863>

<sup>20</sup> Zubair Simonson, “Do You Suffer From Depression? St. Ignatius of Loyola Has Been There Too,” *National Catholic Register*, July 31, 2021, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/ignatius-of-loyola-depression>.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin J. Banet, “Depression and St. Jane de Chantal’s ‘Anguish of Spirit,’” *Catholic 365*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.catholic365.com/article/30646/depression-and-st-jane-de-chantals-anguish-of-spirit.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Mike Eisenbath, “Here’s why I think St. John of God should be a new patron for the mentally ill,” *Aleteia*, May 10, 2017, <https://aleteia.org/2017/05/10/heres-why-i-think-st-john-of-god-should-be-a-new-patron-for-the-mentally-ill>.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Quiñones, “‘Christ wants to be with us’: how Catholic ministries are responding to the mental health crisis,” *Catholic News Agency*, April 13, 2024, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/257349/christ-wants-to-be-with-us-how-catholic-ministries-are-responding-to-the-mental-health-crisis>.

<sup>24</sup> St. Francis de Sales writes, “They who wish to thrive and advance in the way of Our Lord should, at the beginning of their actions, both exterior and interior, ask for his grace and offer to his divine Goodness all the good they will do. In this way they will be prepared to bear with peace and serenity all the pain and suffering they will encounter as coming from the fatherly hand of our good God and Savior” (from St. Francis de Sales’ *Spiritual Directory*, translated and made available by The Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, <https://donboscosalesianportal.org/wp-content/uploads/SalesianTextsSpritualDirectory.pdf>). For an expanded explanation, see chapter five of Fr. Thomas F. Dailey’s *Live Well Today: St. Francis de Sale’s Simple Approach to Holiness* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2015).

happens. In so doing, we recall that the Lord is always with us and ready to assist, we unite our actions to Him, and we surrender the outcome to divine providence. This simple practice can be done before big actions and small ones, enjoyable events as well as experiences we know will be hard. It can be done in seconds but makes a world of difference, as you will experience if you incorporate it into your day periodically. As mentioned at the start of this pastoral letter, Jesus tells us that “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). With this practice, we can intentionally do everything *with Him*, begin to flourish as human beings, and experience the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Through the intercession of St. Dymphna, patroness of mental health, I pray for your wholeness and holiness.

+James D. Conley

Bishop of Lincoln

May 2024

Mental Health Awareness Month

## Resources

### For Individuals

If you are thinking about suicide, help is available 24/7 through the suicide and crisis lifeline. Call or text 988 to speak with a crisis counselor or [connect via chat](#). To speak to a crisis counselor in Spanish, call 888-628-9454.

#### *Directories*

[Catholic Therapists](#): Find a therapist who adheres to the teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. (<https://www.catholictherapists.com>)

[Catholic Psychotherapy Association’s Directory](#): Another list of Catholic counselors that includes many who are not found in the previous directory. (<https://cpa.ce21.com/directory>)

[MyCatholicDoctor](#): Find a Catholic medical professional across a variety of specialties. (<https://mycatholicdoctor.com>)

In many states, faithfully-Catholic therapy is available through Catholic Charities. On the internet, search Catholic Charities Counseling and your city or state to find a local branch. Additionally, a growing number of diocesan websites provide local mental health resources. Search mental health and your diocese.

If there is not a Catholic counselor nearby, some Catholic therapists offer tele-therapy online. If you prefer to see a non-Catholic counselor, during the initial consultation ask questions to ensure the therapist will be respectful of your Catholic beliefs and do his/her best to speak into your worldview.

#### *Online Videos*

[Healing the Whole Person](https://virtual.jprihealingcenter.org/course/hwp): A retreat available in person or online focused on healing your wounds and transformation from the heart of the Church. (<https://virtual.jprihealingcenter.org/course/hwp>)

[Reform Wellness](https://www.reformwellness.co): Workshops on Christ-centered wellness, with an emphasis on healing body and soul together. (<https://www.reformwellness.co>)

[The Sanctuary Course for Catholics](https://sanctuarymentalhealth.org/catholics): This free eight-session video series, available in English and Spanish, is for those who want to learn about the intersection of faith and mental health. (<https://sanctuarymentalhealth.org/catholics>)

[The Resilient Catholics Community](https://members.soulsandhearts.com/rcc): A community of like-minded Catholics from around the world, who are committed to their human formation and grounded in an authentic Catholic understanding of the human person. (<https://members.soulsandhearts.com/rcc>)

[A Future with Hope: A Conversation with Bishop James Conley about his Pastoral Letter on Mental Health](https://youtu.be/HUTkcn3WU1E): Bishop Conley gives additional insight into his own mental health journey and his decision to write this pastoral letter on mental health. (<https://youtu.be/HUTkcn3WU1E>)

[Bishop Conley's Story](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ35xfvnHal): In this homily from SEEK 2023, Bishop Conley preaches about his mental health journey to 19,000 college students. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ35xfvnHal>)

#### *Apps*

For Liturgy of the Hours: Praying the Liturgy of the Hours via the four-volume book set can be confusing, but there are free apps that make it easy. Divine Office, iBreviary, Laudate and Word on Fire are a few of the many available.

For general prayer: On [Hallow](https://hallow.com) popular figures like Mark Wahlberg, Jonathan Roumie, and Fr. Mike Schmitz lead you in guided prayer and reflection. (<https://hallow.com>)

#### *Podcasts*

[Restore the Glory](https://www.restoretheglorypodcast.com): Two Catholic therapists discuss healing and the restoration of our God-given glory. (<https://www.restoretheglorypodcast.com>)

[Being Human](https://beinghuman.catholicpsych.com): Dr. Greg Bottaro of CatholicPsych Institute explores a Catholic vision of therapy and what it means to be human. (<https://beinghuman.catholicpsych.com>)

[Optimal Work](#): Dr. Kevin Majeres, a Harvard Medical School lecturer, shares the psychology and neuroscience behind overcoming stress and flourishing at work and beyond.

(<https://drmajeres.com/podcasts>)

[Souls & Hearts](#): Interior Integration for Catholics podcast by Dr. Peter Malinoski. Includes a series of discussions with experts on human formation. (<https://www.soulsandhearts.com/iic/>)

### *Books*

[\*The Catholic Guide to Depression: How the Saints, the Sacraments, and Psychiatry Can Help You Break Its Grip and Find Happiness Again\*](#): by Dr. Aaron Kheriaty

(<https://www.amazon.com/Catholic-Guide-Depression-Aaron-Kheriaty/dp/1933184760>)

[Litanies of the Heart](#): by Dr. Gerry Crete (<https://www.soulsandhearts.com/lit/>)

[Be Healed](#): by Dr. Bob Schuchts (<https://www.amazon.com/Be-Healed-Guide-Encountering-Powerful/dp/1594714762>)

[Consecration to St. Joseph](#): by Fr. Donald Calloway (<https://consecrationtostjoseph.org/>)

### **For Parishes**

[Mental Illness Theological Framework](#): The National Catholic Partnership on Disability's framework for the Church's ministry for and with people with mental illness provides recommended action items for a parish mental health ministry. (<https://ncpd.org/disability-mental-illness/mental-illness-theological-framework>)

[The Sanctuary Course for Catholics](#): Start a small group with this free eight-session video series, available in English and Spanish, and begin the conversation in your parish about faith and mental health. (<https://sanctuarymentalhealth.org/catholics>)

[National Catholic Mental Health Campaign Resources](#). USCCB resources, including a novena, for mental health. (<https://www.usccb.org/mental-health>)

### **For Bishops**

[Holy Alliance](#): A support ministry specifically for bishops that provides confidential connection with licensed Catholic psychologists and psychiatrists at no cost.