

Praying For and With Families Experiencing Mental Illness

Scripture

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"
(Matt 27:46)

*"Come to me all you who are weary and
overburdened and I will give you rest"* (Matt 11:28)

*"Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you, I have
called you by your name, you are mine"* (Is 43:1)

See also: Isaiah 41:9-10, Jeremiah 29:11-13,
John 14:1.27, Matthew 25:31-46.

Prayer

May people affected in any way by mental illness
know that the Lord is there alongside
them, sharing their pain and sorrow and may
God's Church be there for them too. Amen.

Resources, Support and Advice

Helplines

Samaritans 08457 909090

Saneline 08457 678000

Rethink Advice Service 02089 746814

Young Minds Parents Information Service
08000 182138

Websites

Association of Pastoral Care in Mental Health

www.pastoral.org.uk/

Carers: www.carersinthecommunity.org.uk

Rethink: www.rethink.org

MIND www.mind.org.uk

Resources

Association of Christian Counsellors

www.acc-uk.org/

Promoting Mental Health: A Resource for Spiritual
and Pastoral Care. Download from

www.mentality.org.uk/services/resources/spirituality.htm

Caritas-social action

www.caritas-socialaction.org.uk

NHS Trust Newspapers often list local support
groups (obtainable at doctors' surgeries).

More information and resources available at:

[www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk/
mentalhealth.html](http://www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk/mentalhealth.html)

For local information please contact:



This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to
become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive.

For further information contact:

Marriage and Family Life Project Office, CBCEW
39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX

Email: everybodyswelcome@celebratingfamily.org.uk



what is life like if you or
someone in your family
*has a mental
health
problem?*
...and what can your
parish family do to make
a difference?

What is it like for people suffering mental illness and for their families?

I came home, I can't work any more. I was suffering from anxiety depression. Soon my wife, Liz and I experienced extreme isolation. Several parishioners said to her, 'I would not stay with him'. Priests and friends said 'We cannot visit any more. There is too much pain here. Why can't he pull himself together?'

'I'm in a black tunnel. The light at the end is dimmer. I don't want to die, but I don't want to live like this. Help me, Mam', my daughter pleads. I feel helpless. There must be other families going through this. Where are they? I feel so empty and broken. Where are you God?

My husband suffers from mental illness. I contacted my priest to explain my family situation. He said he could not offer any support. My husband had previously contacted him during an episode of illness, so he was not happy with us. My children did not attend Catholic school or receive any other sacraments. This makes me feel guilty and very sad.

One day he snapped and became abusive and violent during Mass. We had to obtain professional advice and work with the priest and parishioners to bring about reconciliation with those who had been hurt.

Although his behaviour was sometimes unpredictable the priest let him read at Mass. An ambition fulfilled! After that he felt able to shake hands with parishioners at the sign of peace – acceptance given and respect shown!

What does this mean for parishes?

"In our parishes, people are not coming to the Altar of the Lord because they suffer from mental illness and do not feel accepted."

Those who suffer from mental illness (and their carers) experience isolation and lack of support from their parish. 1 in 5 suffer from mental illness but most of us have very little understanding of what it is like or the effect it has on carers and families.

Even among Catholics there is stigma concerning mental health which can create feelings of unworthiness and reluctance to share the truth that a family member is suffering. So what can parishes do? Here are some ideas:

- Form a mental health pastoral support group. Invite people who are sensitive to the needs and who have personal or professional experience.
- Commit to showing that the parish cares about those with mental illness and their families through concrete activities. Be especially alert to the voices of the isolated.
- Raise awareness and create sensitivity in the parish perhaps by organising an open evening (where at least two people share their experience) or invite someone to speak at a Sunday Mass.
- Establish what local professional resources are available including Christian Counsellors. Have a list of useful numbers to hand and on the parish noticeboard.

- Set up a spiritual and friendship group for sufferers, carers and their families as appropriate.
- Create links with local schools to ensure a confidential exchange of information when this is appropriate.
- Ensure that appropriate language is used by people and in print within the parish.

The Association of Pastoral Care in Mental Health website contains guidance for many of these activities. Also contact your Everybody's Welcome diocesan coordinator (See resources section)

Home-centred care

- Offer a listening ministry
- Bring the Eucharist or simply pray
- Find out how the parish can help, no matter how small a need: "Someone walked to Mass with me every day."

Parish-centred care

- Arrange regular healing services for sufferers and their carers
- Involve them in the Sunday liturgy
- Mention sufferers and carers in the prayers of intercession
- Be prepared to accept unusual behaviour in church

Community-focussed care

- Keep the church open as much as possible as a place of peace
- Encourage community groups to use church facilities for meetings