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## An Inclusive Church Is Like A Stained Glass Window

By Deacon Tom Lambert

When we see a stained glass window in a church, we are struck by the beauty of the story it tells. The window usually depicts a story from scripture or an aspect of our faith. Taken as a whole, the window gives a complete picture of a particular story or inspiring moment. When we approach the window and look closely at the art, we see that the window is made up of many pieces of glass. The pieces have different shapes and sizes, some are large and some are tiny. We see that the pieces are made of different colors. Upon closer inspection, we see that the pieces have flaws in them, some have lines or cracks, others have tiny air bubbles in the glass. But taken together as a whole, the unique pieces, big and small, of various colors, with all their flaws transcend their individuality and come together at the hand of the artist to give a dynamic story of faith. But what happens if part of the window is missing? What if we were to remove all the purple pieces of glass, or remove the large pieces, or the ones with bubbles in them? The picture would be incomplete. We would not get the whole story.

The body of Christ, the faith community, in one sense, is like a stained glass window. It lives the story of redemption and salvation in the reality of everyday life. The pieces of the story are made up of many kinds and sorts of people—young people, elderly people, married people and single people, people of color, people of different shapes and sizes, people who are divorced, people with various disabilities, etc.... Like the stained glass window, the body of Christ is made up of many parts. If we intentionally or unintentionally exclude, discriminate against or ignore one or more of the parts, we do not get the whole picture. We are missing the full story. The picture is incomplete.

For people with mental illnesses the societal stigma and misperceptions of the disease often keep them from participating in our parishes. The stigma and misperception by society are felt within their own community of faith. Parishes, rather than mirroring the cultural biases of society, should be challenging those assumptions and accepting and reaching out to all people—to open doors and minds to the gifts of all God's people. In places where there are barriers, either physical or attitudinal, the image of God's kingdom is far less clear and the story is incomplete. Parishes that truly welcome and include everyone in a proactive way portray the story of redemption and salvation as a clear and beautiful image of God's people.



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