
Welcoming and Valuing People with Mental Illness

Every parish has members who experience a serious mental illness or who have a close friend or family member who lives with the condition. With this reality in mind, parishes must thoughtfully consider how they can more fully welcome people



The most important thing I think I could pass on to a pastoral worker or somebody in a parish, is the need for a person to be accepted and loved, not in a phony way, not in a patronizing way, but to be genuinely accepted; not just to be given something to do within in the parish but to allow a person in, in such a way they know that they are respected, their dignity is known by the other person, and that they have something to offer.

– Fr. Bob Malloy, O.F.M., Cap.

affected by mental illness into the life of the community in a way that values their gifts and contributions to the church family.

Recognize

Recognizing that some people in the parish are affected by mental illness can help transform these usually “hidden” conditions into acknowledged realities in the lives of parishioners, just like physical health problems.

Consider

Considering with people with mental illnesses and their loved

ones how they experience Mass and other components of the life of the parish can lead to more meaningful participation. This process may reveal words or actions to be avoided because they stigmatize or exclude.

Facilitate Sense of Belonging

The formation of trusting relationships is basic to the experience of belonging. This can be accomplished in a number of ways: including the needs of persons with

mental illness and their families in the Prayers of the Faithful (name personally only with permission), providing needed accommodations (i.e., allowing for movement for some people unable to tolerate staying in one place during an entire liturgy or parish event), inviting people who might be shy or withdrawn to participate in liturgical ministries or other roles within the parish, accompanying a parishioner with mental illness to parish activities and introducing them to others.

Encourage

Encouraging all the members of the parish and its staff to ask questions and learn more about the effects of mental illness can increase the ability to respond in the most compassionate and pastorally appropriate manner.

Transform

When a parish becomes more welcoming of parishioners with mental illness and more appreciative of their gifts, it is evident that the power of God is at work transforming the community.



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