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MI Network News

The Monthly Newsletter of the National Catholic Network on Mental Illness



December 2009

Greetings!

Peace and Joy to you as we anticipate the celebration of Christ's incarnation. May God's blessing be upon you and your ministry now and throughout the New Year.

This is our **SECOND** NCPD Council on Mental Illness Network Newsletter.

We want to hear from you!

Please tell us about your ministry: what you are doing, what are your hopes, and what are your struggles. One of our goals is to network ideas and ministries so that we can all share in the day-to-day life of people trying to make a difference by being Christ to one another.

Please send all emails to me, Deacon Tom Lambert, at olminfo2@aol.com and put **NCPD Council on MI Network** in the subject line. You can also call me at 773-525-0453 if you have any questions or ideas.



CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

A Moment of Grace Amidst Chaos

In this Christmas season we think of God breaking into history. We acknowledge that there are times in our lives when we are specially touched by God who became flesh. It can happen in a moment of prayer or a life experience. It so often comes in unexpected ways, unanticipated moments that give us an insight into the power of God's love for each of us. This especially seems true when we love unconditionally with a non-judgmental compassion for others. In these moments God's presence is powerful.

A few years ago, a person called to say that her friend, a woman with a mental illness, was being counseled by a therapist to get an abortion. The friend was unwed, homeless, and needed to be on medication for her illness. The woman and the father of her child wanted to have her baby. This meant she could not be on all her medications, a situation fraught with problems for the mother and the baby.

In the midst of this, the father of the child, a homeless person who had been using drugs and also has a mental illness, came for spiritual counseling. He had given up his drug habit when he learned he was going to be a father. Given his life situation he could not meet regularly but did occasionally come.

They decided to have the child but, sadly, the baby died during the pregnancy. Both the father and the mother were devastated. In the midst of their grief, they wanted to honor the brief life of this unborn child and asked us if there was something that could be done. A liturgy was planned that we hoped would bring peace and closure to a sad chapter in two very chaotic lives. The night of the service we were not sure who would show up or even if the mother would make it. We didn't really know what to expect as the lives of people with mental illness can be unpredictable. In fact we started the prayer service late because on her way to our church the mother turned to go back to where she was staying as she was not sure she could handle the service.

We held the service in the small chapel next to our church. It is a peaceful setting with stained glass windows depicting God's creation, reminding us that everything He created is good. The mother and father of the child did attend and surprisingly the estranged parents of the mother and father also came. In all, sixteen people were present, half of whom were homeless and have a mental illness. For us, in all the years of our ministry, it was one of the most incredible moments of grace and healing. There was a deep reverence and prayerfulness. The sharing after the readings brought tears to everyone's eyes. The mother and father expressed their grief as well as a profound understanding of the mystery of life. There was sadness at their loss yet hope in the belief of being together in the kingdom to come. God's tangible presence was felt by all. For one evening in the lives of people struggling with overwhelming odds and huge problems—some due to their illness, some due to the failure of the mental health system to help them, some due to their own choices—there was peace and healing. There was forgiveness and acceptance. There were no judgments made, only prayer and support offered and received.



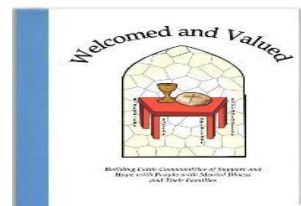
As we left the chapel that evening and went off into the night, each our separate ways, we dreamed of somehow keeping the group together while knowing full well we most likely would never see anyone again. We knew that for a brief moment God had brought us all together to love unconditionally, to share a sacred moment, and to experience the raw power of God's love.

Merry Christmas to each of you and may your journey be filled with God's grace.

Deacon Tom and Rita Lambert

NEWS

NCPD's spring webinar will be devoted to the topic of *Advanced Conversations: Youth and Young Adults and Mental Illness*. Please let us know if you have any programs that address this important issue. We will let you know the details of the seminar as they are developed.



We are hopeful of getting funding to do more one-day awareness workshops and 3-day advanced trainings like what was piloted in 2009. If you are aware of any diocese or group that would like to participate in co-sponsoring a gathering, please let us know.

RESOURCES

NCPD WEBINARS

Don't forget to tell people about NCPD archived webinars at www.NCPD.org/webinars. These are valuable resources for ministry to people with mental illness and their families. There are three specifically on mental illness.

October 20, 2009:

*Access to Tools in Addressing Suicide:
Pastoral Supports and Prevention Strategies*

October 6, 2008:

*Come to the Table:
Nurturing the Sacramental Life of People with Mental Illnesses*

October 10, 2007:

Supporting People with Mental Illness in your Parish

NCPD : WELCOMED AND VALUED DVD & RESOURCE MANUAL



The *Welcomed and Valued* DVD and *Resource Manual* can be ordered on the NCPD website at www.ncpd.org/resources. The DVD Discussion Starters and the Resource Manual are both available online for a free download ([Click here](#)).



OTHER RESOURCES

I thought I would spotlight from time to time other websites that deal with mental illness and faith. One such website is Mental Health Ministries at www.mentalhealthministries.net/. It has timely information on "Mental Illness: Coping for the Holidays" along with other resources. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, a Board Member of Pathways to Promise, operates the website. She is a United Methodist Minister and as she says on her website:



"As a United Methodist Minister and a person who has struggled with depression, I started Mental Health Ministries with a vision of producing high quality resources to reduce the stigma of mental illness in our faith communities. I experienced first hand the reluctance of our faith communities to talk about or to minister to persons with a mental illness and their families. Too often mental illness is thought of as a moral or spiritual failure rather than a treatable illness. Many persons with a mental health issues will go first to their clergy or faith leader. But studies show that many clergy are not effective in providing the support and referrals that individuals and their families need.


Helping faith communities become caring congregations is my passion. The response I receive from groups using our resources to educate about mental illness is overwhelming. I've had the privilege of speaking at conferences and seminars nationwide to give the message that hope and recovery are possible. When mental illness is openly discussed, people will come out of the shadows. It is my prayer that our congregations will be there to surround them with the care and compassionate support. Hope is a gift our faith communities can give to all of us who struggle with these disorders of the brain."

I hope you find this website useful. If you are aware of any other resources that you find helpful, let us know.

May God bless all you do,

Deacon Tom Lambert
Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago - Commission on Mental Illness
Co-Chair, NCPD Council on Mental Illness



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COUNCIL ON MENTAL ILLNESS

Please consider making a donation to support the mission of the Council on Mental Illness. Your help allows this effort to continue.

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to NCPD**

Our Mission:

Following Jesus who embraced all, we assist the Catholic Community in reaching out to and accompanying our brothers and sisters with mental illness and their families, assuring their rightful place in the Church and society.

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If you wish to receive this newsletter, [click here](#) to submit your email.

The logo depicts the Eucharistic table, to which all are called.

It also presents four dimensions to personal wholeness, each important to healing and recovery—spiritual, biological, psychological, and social.



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