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MI Network News

The Monthly Newsletter of the National Catholic Network on Mental Illness



February 2010

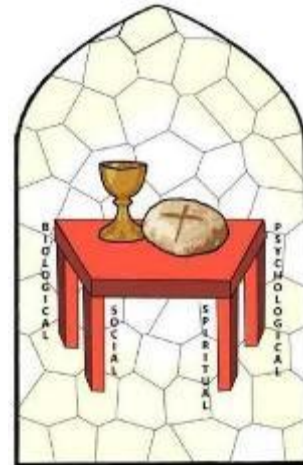
Greetings! Peace and Joy!

May God's blessing be upon you and your ministry now and throughout the New Year.

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

Please tell us about your ministry: what you are doing, what are your hopes, what resources do you find helpful, 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 olmcinfo2@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.



SHARING FROM THE NETWORK

U. S. Catholic Magazine Article

US Catholic's February 2010 issue has a cover story titled "Through a glass darkly: How Catholics struggle with mental illness." It quotes many from our Catholic Network. I encourage you to read it and pass it on! [Click here](#) to view.

What a Parish Can Do

by Deacon Tom Lambert

I would like to share with you a personal story, a homily, and an example of what a parish can do.

I became a Godfather this past Sunday!! It is a particular joy for me because of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the baby. I spoke of those circumstances in a homily I gave last fall at all the weekend masses at a suburban Chicago parish. The parish invited me during October as part of their month long presentation on life issues. After each mass the parish had representatives of mental health agencies, NAMI, and

support groups like our Commission on Mental Illness and our Faith and Fellowship program available to talk to people about mental illness. They also had some good food! Many people stopped by after each mass and were very grateful for the information. If anyone would like more specific information on what the parish did I will be glad to put you in touch with the person who organized it.

My homily brings up some specific Illinois issues but the issues are universal to the care of people with mental illness and their families.

Thank you for inviting me back to your parish. My name is Deacon Tom Lambert a founding member of the Archdiocesan Commission on Mental illness. I am a past president of NAMI - ILLINOIS and the parent of a person with a mental illness.

I have been a deacon for 26 years both in the suburbs and the city. For the last 8 years I've been serving as a full time volunteer on the staff of Our Lady of Mt Carmel parish. The parish is located just south of Wrigley field in the midst of high rise buildings and run down hotels. The old hotels house people who are one step away from living on the street. As I walk the streets surrounding the parish, I am always amazed by the intersection of affluence and poverty that occurs in our neighborhood.

Some of the people have lived there a very long time. Some of the people are from the suburbs whose children are grown and decided to move into the city. Some are young people who come to Chicago for jobs. Some are people who lost their jobs and homes in the suburbs and now live in poverty.

Among both the affluent and poor, among those who have lived there a long time and those who are recent arrivals are people with mental illnesses. People struggling to keep their lives together. If I have discovered anything over the years -- it's that mental illness does not discriminate. It affects the rich and the poor, the young and the elderly, the suburbanite and the city dweller. Mental illness is a no fault disease, no one who is mentally ill chooses to be that way.

Mental illness is also is a "no casserole" disease. By that I mean when mental illness occurs in a family - no one comes to the door bringing casseroles. Twenty-five years ago my wife had heart surgery and while she was in the hospital the doorbell never stopped ringing. I never realized how many ways there were to cook chicken! Twenty years ago, when my daughter was hospitalized for mental illness, no one came to the door..... Mental illness can be very isolating for the person and the family.

A few months ago, a young woman knocked on the door of our parish ministry center and asked if she could talk to someone. As I sat and listened to her story, she told me she just found out she was pregnant and she was very scared. She always dreamed of being a mother but she and her husband had not planned on having a child. She worried that she might not be willing to have the child. She said I might not understand



but she is a person with a severe and persistent mental illness, She has bi-polar disorder and anxiety. She wondered if she could make it through the pregnancy and would God hear her prayers. She had a good psychiatrist, and a good therapist, but she needed something more. She needed to know God loved her and would comfort her during her pregnancy. I explained to her who I was and what I do. We both smiled at how God works!! I talked to her frequently during her pregnancy and two weeks ago she had a beautiful healthy baby girl.

She experienced the birth of her baby through the eyes of faith --- as a miracle from God. Both are doing finebut she still needs support. She needs friends, people who aren't professionals but are spiritual. When she stopped at our parish door, she needed to know God loves her and NOW she knows she can find God's love in her Catholic faith community.

The young woman who came to the door at our parish took a risk that she would be welcomed and valued. As a person with mental illness she didn't always feel that way both in society and in Church, feelings that were at times perceived and at times very real experiences. She felt a lot of the stigma associated with mental illness; stigma due to misinformation about the illness.

A recent example of stigma, is the story in the Chicago Tribune, about violence in nursing homes that have mixed populations of people with mental illness and the elderly. The story, while trying to help, feeds a stereotype that people with mental illness are violent and dangerous. Whereas the facts are people with mental illness are way more often victims of crimes than the rare perpetrators of them. The sensationalism of the story also glosses over the fact that the system for treating people with mental illness in Illinois is disjointed and grossly underfunded.

Let me be clear - The mental health care system in Illinois is broken!!

Providers of mental health services such as are here today do wonderful jobs yet are under tremendous financial duress due to years of insufficient state funding and recent severe cutbacks. I know of mental health agencies around the state who are cutting programs and closing doors due to lack of funds. The tragedy and injustice is that we know that treatment works. We know that every dollar spent today will save 5 or more down the road. Recovery for a person with mental illness means living a life with dignity, finding work and housing. Yet Illinois, one of the richest states in per capita income, continues to rank among the lowest for funding mental health services. I often tell people that I am offended by the Illinois mental health system both as a person of faith and as a taxpayer.

Because we underfund mental health services, many people are caught in a never ending cycle of crisis, many do not ever recover from their illness, and some in who are in crisis take their own lives.

In the Gospel story this morning the man asks Jesus what must he do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer to the rich man challenges him to look beyond his own needs and follow Him -- by being willing to sacrifice. Salvation comes through Christ who was willing to sacrifice His life for us. The rich young man lived in a culture, much like the one we live in, that valued wealth as a sign of God's blessing --- not sacrifice. In today's Gospel, Jesus again turns that cultural value upside down. Salvation, eternal life, is

what we, who follow Christ, value. Sacrificing for one another is the way we live.

We are called to follow Jesus' example and be concerned about others and not just our own needs. The Gospel calls us to live a life that is counter cultural. A life that ensures people who our wealth centered society doesn't value receive the dignity and rights they are entitled to as human beings created in the image of God.

Pope John Paul II in his talk "The image of God in people with mental illness" said that the church will not hesitate to become the voice of those who are not listened to, not to demand charity, but to ask for justice.

1 in 17 people who live in our neighborhoods, here at St Thomas and at Mt Carmel, are or will deal with a mental illness over the period of their lifetime and 1 in 5 families are or will be affected. We often don't hear their stories because of the stigma. As church, we are called not to mirror the values of society but to live the vision Jesus calls us to.

As a parish, we are called to be more than welcoming, after all, Walmart is welcoming - they have a greeter at every door!! We are called to welcome, to value, and to invite people into a deeper relationship with the lord. To provide a place where people, like the young woman who came to my parish door, can feel they are loved unconditionally, where they can find hope. A place where we can experience God, who is love, through the love we have for one another.

At St Thomas, I know you do that but like Jesus did in the gospel this morning I'm going to ask you to do more. To pray for people with mental illness and their families.

To demand justice in the mental health system. To support and help in your parish mental health ministry. Please stop by after mass to find out more about what help is available for you or someone you know and what specific things you can do.

We invite you to please share what is going on in your ministry.

RESOURCES

Catholic Charities - Camden Diocese Website

The Catholic Charities website of the diocese of Camden has a list of mental illness with definitions, signs to look for, symptoms, and other useful information. To view the information on the website [click here](#).

NCPD WEBINARS

As mentioned last newsletter, please tell people about NCPD webinars on mental illnesses at www.NCPD.org/webinars. Posted at this site are links to view the webinar and accompanying materials. These are available for free and are valuable resources for ministry to people with mental illness and their families. There are three on mental illness.

October 20, 2009:

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

October 6, 2008:

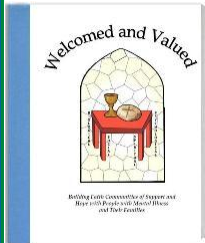
*Come to the Table:
Nurturing the Sacramental Life of People with Mental Illnesses*

October 10, 2007:

Supporting People with Mental Illness in your Parish

* Webinars are available for replay up to one year from the event date. They will also be available for purchase at <http://www.ncpd.org/resources> .

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](#)).



UPCOMING EVENTS

NCPD's spring webinar will be devoted to the topic of *Advanced Conversations: Youth and Young Adults and Mental Illness*. More information in upcoming newsletters. ([Click here](#) to visit the NCPD Webinar web page.)



We are hopeful of getting funding to do more one-day awareness workshops and 3-day advanced trainings like what was piloted in 2009. The Council can also be a resource for people planning their own local meetings. Please let us know if we can be of assistance.

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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