

DECEMBER 2010

Greetings Network Members!

I came across this poem that is attributed to Mother Teresa and was struck by its simplicity and yet profound insight.

The Simple Path

The fruit of silence is

Prayer

The fruit of prayer is

Faith

The fruit of Faith is

Love

The fruit of Love is

Service

The fruit of Service is

Peace





Christmas is a time that calls us to simplicity and profound contemplation on the wonderful mystery of the incarnation. Amidst the chaos of the “holiday” we are called to the quiet joy of the word made flesh amongst us – the holy day. This mystery of faith, God breaking into human history, is something to be entered into rather than something to be figured out.

Our prayer for you, this Christmas, is that the fruit of your contemplation of this sacred mystery will bring you peace, joy and happiness in the New Year.

Deacon Tom Lambert and NCPD’s Council on Mental Illness

REFLECTIONS

The following is a reflection by Connie Rakitan, co-chair NCPD’s Council on Mental Illness and Program Director of Faith and Fellowship, a program for people with mental illness.

In the bleak midwinter...

The beginning of a somewhat less familiar Christmas carol, music by Gustav Holst and words from a poem by Christina Rossetti. It’s one of my favorites, but this year hearing it reminds me of Jason.* Jason’s life seems to sometimes be just one, long, bleak mid-winter. He has pretty severe schizophrenia with a lot of obsessive and compulsive tendencies. What he says doesn’t always make much sense; his view of reality is idiosyncratic; he often looks out at and converses with unseen companions. He lives in a board-and-care where the staff and the other residents find him obstinate and annoying. He has neither family nor friends.

Every other Thursday afternoon, Jason can be found in the 2nd floor meeting room of the former convent building of a parish not far from where he lives. He is joined by four or five other individuals who have mental illness in various forms and degrees, as well as a small group of companions who come together for recreation and spiritual friendship. For awhile, they all enjoy such



activities as puzzles, drawing, journaling, or working with clay, while soothing music plays and conversations are gentle. Jason usually spends his time wandering around the room, organizing supplies on the shelves in an order known only to him, reading from his Bible, or sitting with one or another member. He appears happy and at ease, pretty rare for him.

Later, members gather in a circle to reflect on their lives and their faith. Recently, the discussion had to do with where one finds power in one's life. Many responses were given, but Jason's was: *prayer*. Here is a man, powerless in an illness that takes away his ability to function "normally," and powerless in a mental health system that offers him neither support nor dignity. Here is a man whose powerlessness is indeed an ongoing bleak midwinter – and here is a man who clings to prayer as his power. He rambled on for awhile, about half of which he said not making much sense, but all of us listened with respect and compassion – and appreciation for the depth of his faith and his openness in sharing it.

Afterwards, somebody commented, "I wonder what it must be like to be Jason." I do, too. I wonder how it must feel to be trapped in a world of inner chaos, unable to navigate the ordinary functions of job, shopping, cooking, studying. I wonder what it must be like to know only the bleakness of being misunderstood, stigmatized, rejected. I wonder what it must be like to have brief sparks of genuine awareness and understanding, fleeting conversations that make sense – and then to lose them once again.



And then another song comes to mind: *Lo! How a Rose E'er Blooming*. Somewhere in our bleak midwinters a rose blooms. Even Jason's bleakness is relieved by his faith, his fellowship with others who love and accept him, by a chance to be at peace in a church that offers unquestioning hospitality and a place where he is free to be himself. He sometimes speaks of enjoying our "café," an agape shared after prayer where we enjoy pie or cheese-and-crackers or whatever, sitting at a table together, using "real" dishes (none of that disposable stuff!), candles and placemats.

Next week, I tell myself, we shall put roses on our agape/café table. We will have roses in December, in our bleak midwinter. It won't be so bleak after all.

**not his real name*

EXCERPTS FROM *WELCOMED AND VALUED*

The following is taken from the “Welcomed and Valued” Resource Binder (pgs. 8 and 9) . It reminds us of what Jesus did and what we are about as well as our call to combat the stigma that keeps people from getting the help they need.

The entire resource binder is available for free download at <http://www.ncpd.org/ministries-programs/specific/mentalillness>.

Transforming Perceptions

The entire ministry of Jesus was about transforming perceptions—revealing the truth and infinite value of each person against the stereotypes and alienating perceptions that divide and marginalize people.

—Blessed are you poor in spirit... Matt. 5:3-12

—Let the children come to Me... Mark 10:13-16

—A Levite....passed by on the other side of the road....A Samaritan.....had compassion...Luke 10:29-37

—As he passed by, he saw a man blind by birth.....who sinned, this man or his parents.....It was not this man, or his parents but that the works of God might be made manifest in him... John 9:1-41

—Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.....Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. John 7:53 - 8:11

—If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine...Rejoice with me, I have found my sheep that was lost. Luke 15:3-7

—You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy' but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... Matt 5:38- 48

—The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame...
Luke 14:15-24

Jesus’ penetrating questions disarm righteous attitudes and expose hypocrisy and prejudice. Today, God's grace is at work challenging our perceptions of each other and guiding us to regard each person with love that has no conditions.



In our parishes are people who live daily with mental illness, at times not evident, and at other times experiencing episodes that disrupt every aspect of life, particularly relationships. Most basic in making a difference in the lives of parishioners with mental illness is a loving regard for the person that seeks to better understand the challenges of the illness, accompanying the person in whatever way possible to communicate that they are not alone on this journey through healing and recovery. All human life is sacred. Every person created in God's

image, reflecting the likeness of God is deserving of utmost respect and dignity even in the midst of episodes of illness. Nothing can diminish that dignity and worth, not mental illness or any condition. Each person is a significant contributor to the wholeness of the Body of Christ forming a community of faith that celebrates each other's joys and bears each other's burdens. The compassion and love that marks the followers of Jesus must be evidenced in the Church's regard for all members of the Body of Christ whose lives are challenged by this illness. Praying for the grace to love as Jesus loves, to grow in understanding, to be a companion to those in need of acceptance and support is the beginning of perceptions transformed.

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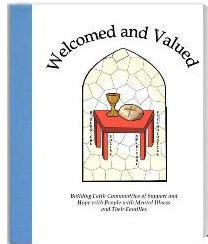
COMING IN THE NEW YEAR

In addition to webinars this year that deal with veterans with disabilities and PTSD, Catechesis, and physician assisted suicide, we will have several *NCPD Council on Mental Illness* national network conference calls. The calls will cover subjects related to outreach to people with mental illness and their families. The entire network will be invited to participate as well as anyone interested in the topic. Please watch for details in the new year.



Also, if you have any topics you think we should cover you can let Deacon Tom Lambert know at olmcinfo2@aol.com.

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](#)).



We are hopeful of getting funding to do more one-day awareness workshops and three-day advanced trainings like those 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 or if you know of any funding sources for our work.

FROM THE EDITOR

We invite you to tell us about your ministry. What are you 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 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.

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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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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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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