



# Mental Illness Network News

The Monthly Newsletter of the  
National Catholic Network on Mental Illness



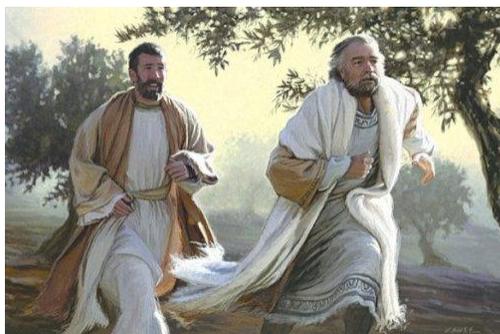
## MARCH-APRIL 2012

### Easter Joy

Soon we will encounter the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. We approach the Triduum with an understanding of the sacrifice Christ made for us. He suffered, died, and was buried. The disciples, whether hiding in an upper room or walking away from Jerusalem, or going to the tomb to anoint the dead body, were crushed by the turn their lives had taken. On the road to Emmaus, even when Jesus stood before the two, they did not recognize Him. Was it depression, or traumatic stress that kept them from seeing who it was?

The disciples “recovery” was in the breaking of the bread at the inn, it was in the “Peace be with you” in the upper room, it was in finding an empty tomb, it was in Thomas touching the wounds that had wounded Thomas so deeply.

We may have been wounded by life or experienced the dark night of the soul but Easter gives us hope. Easter gives us an opportunity to touch our wounds through the celebration of the Easter sacraments. God never



abandons us and is present to us even when we don't know He is there. The close of Mathew's Gospel tells us “I am with you always to the end of the age.”

I pray this Easter that you always feel strength and joy like those disciples who ran from the tomb to tell the others, like Thomas who proclaimed “My Lord and My God,” like the two who returned from Emmaus to announce the Good News. They eagerly told those who were still hurting “He is risen!”

Easter is an opportunity to enter deeper into the mystery of God's love for us by sharing that love with those who are hurting.

May God's peace be with you always,

Deacon Tom Lambert

**“To the world - you may be one person,  
but to one person – you may be the world.”**

The following excerpts are from a talk given by Gunnar Christiansen, a NAMI Faithnet Board Member, to the Fuller Seminary and School of Psychology in California:



As it is written by Dr. John Baggett of North Carolina in an excellent brochure created for NAMI in 1987, “when mental illness strikes in a family, it is like being struck by lightning. It is unexpected and devastating.”

Expectations are shattered. Sometimes even one's faith is challenged.

Our son, developed hallucinations and delusions during his third year at a University 26 years ago. Within just a few months he disappeared and began living on the street in incredibly awful circumstances during the next 15 years. He would sometimes stand on street corners preaching and sometimes stand in the middle of a busy intersection directing traffic. Once he was found in another city lying on the sidewalk during a cold rainstorm dressed only in plastic garbage bags. He wasn't addicted to alcohol or taking illegal drugs. He didn't even smoke. At no fault of his own, he had a mental illness.

Despite the fact that he was obviously mentally ill and deteriorating both mentally and physically, our legal system prevented us and society as a whole from doing anything significant for him. He had anosognosia, the inability to recognize that he had a mental problem. So it is not surprising that he refused to take medication. He refused to have psychological counseling. He was not deemed to be a threat to

others and despite living in deplorable circumstances and getting much of his food from garbage cans, he was not considered a threat to himself.

[Growing up] I recall my mother getting a daily telephone call from our neighbor, who in retrospect, I recognize had an untreated serious mental illness. She would talk and talk and talk. My mother never complained, listened carefully and occasionally responded in a respectful manner.



When I asked my mother why she was willing to devote such a great deal of time to Lisa, she answered that God loves everyone and he wants everyone to know that He loves them. She went on to explain that we have a wonderful opportunity to play a role in passing God's love to others and just as importantly have the opportunity to receive God's love through others.

I had the privilege of observing the reality of the well used quote, "To the world - you may be one person, but to one person – you may be the world."



Does "Divine Healing" happen in our world? For many of us this concept raises a red flag. It seems we have witnessed too many situations in which those with a mental illness have been psychologically harmed by over-zealous clergy and/or religious groups in their attempt to bring about a miraculous "cure." But is this aggravation obscuring visualization of the opportunity we have to follow a pathway, which leads to healing?

Job's peace of mind did not occur until he was able to accept God's plan for his life, which included suffering. At the conclusion of this provocative book of the Bible, Job makes the statement to God that "My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5). Job truly knew God and was able to accept his plan even though it was beyond his understanding. Job's feeling of assurance of God's justice and fairness despite his severe suffering was a spiritual gift, which I believe is just as available for us today. I believe it is proper to call this process, "Divine Healing."

It is my prayer that all those with a chronic illness, whether physical or mental, will receive this gift.

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Although grammatically correct, every time I use the words "they" and "them" to refer to those with a mental illness, it bothers me. Those with a mental illness are just as much us as anyone.

It is indeed a travesty that there is a need to tell the world that those with a mental illness are just as important as anyone. Jesus certainly demonstrated that we are all equal in his sight.



Whether we have a mental illness or we are chronically normal, we all enjoy being able to do things with others, we all want to be heard and we all want an opportunity to contribute. We particularly want the opportunity to be accepted by and worship with those of our chosen faith.

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I will share a few of my thoughts concerning spirituality.

How great it is, to be able to sense in ourselves and in the lives of others that we are more than just a combination of genes responding to our environment. For certain we are more than the 50 billion nerve cells in our brains and the chemical neurotransmitters that carry electrical impulses between them. I believe it is fair to consider this extra dimension our "spirituality."

It seems that our spirituality opens our hearts and enables us to receive the gift of faith. Through our spirituality we have been given the ability to believe in something for which we have no proof. Through our spirituality I am convinced that we are connected to God.

I respond to visual things and I often visualize one of Michelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. In this particular fresco, God has his arm extended toward the outstretched arm of man and they are just about to touch fingertips. This imagery I have of a loving God reaching out to me as I reach out to him is a special part of my spirituality.



## Network Conference Call

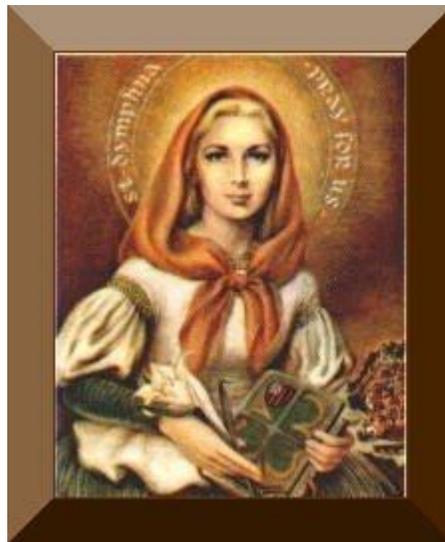
The next National Network Conference Call will be Tuesday, April 24, 12:00 noon - 1:00 pm, EDT. Details will be forthcoming; all are welcome to join in on this toll-free call.

## Ideas to Raise Awareness of Mental Illness

Letty Breton from Gainesville Florida let us know that in May and September she has a mass intention said “For our brothers and sisters with emotional and mental illness, their families and caregivers.” What an easy yet powerful way to pray for and alert the parish to the needs of people with mental illness and their families.

May 15<sup>th</sup> is the feast of St Dymphna. Another opportunity to have a mass intention and prayer for people with mental illness. You can use all or part of the following in the bulletin:

The feast day of St Dymphna falls on May 15th. In the 7th Century, St Dymphna’s father, a Celtic king, became deeply depressed over the death of his wife. Tragically, he came to see his daughter as the re-incarnation of his wife and tried to force her to marry him. St Dymphna fled to Belgium and the king followed her to Geel, flew into a rage and murdered her. There she was buried in a crypt beneath the local Church. Six Centuries later



workmen uncovered the crypt and found a tomb made of a shining white stone that is only found hundreds of miles away from Geel. The town's people considered it a miracle that God had provided for her in this way and soon reports of healings spread across the area, in particular healings of people with mental illness.



The site became a pilgrimage center. In the 13th Century, a new church was built, the Church of St Dymphna and a makeshift hospital was located at the Church. People were coming from all over to

find comfort and care for their loved ones with mental illness. The church soon was overwhelmed with patients and the parish priest began to ask people to take patients into their homes. In the way of life of the middle ages, this meant that the person accepted into the home was involved in the cooking, cleaning, farming and total way of life. For those who were too sick to work, there was a hospital that the townspeople supported but most were cared for in the homes of the villagers. Thus what we know today as “foster care” began in 13th Century Geel.

One of the many remarkable things about this story is that during this period of time, in other parts of Europe, people who exhibited symptoms of mental illness were believed to be possessed by demons. They were either locked away in prisons or banished from their homes and communities. Yet in Geel, truly a miracle of understanding and acceptance was taking place as people with mental illness were treated with dignity and compassion that enabled them to experience recovery from their illness. It should also be noted that in the early 19th Century, Napoleon ordered that all people who were mentally ill be committed to asylums. Despite that order, the people of Geel refused to hand over the ones they considered to be part of their family

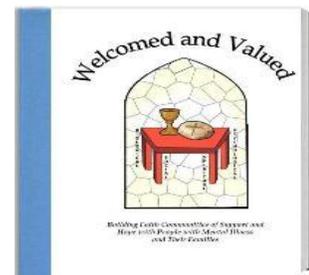
Today in Geel, there are over 700 families hosting over 800 individuals in their homes. For over eight centuries Geel has maintained a history of compassionate loving care for those society often ignores or shuns. Geel's town symbol is a clock with no hands. This means that you have care for as long as you need! An ideal much needed today.

## 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](http://www.ncpd.org/resources).

The DVD Discussion Starters and the Resource Manual are both available online for a free download ([Click here](#)).

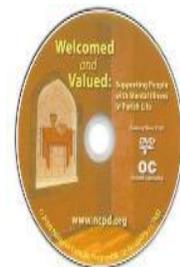


We are hopeful of getting funding to do more one-day awareness workshops and three-day advanced trainings like those piloted in 2009 and conducted in 2010 and 2011. The Council can also be a resource for people planning their own local meetings. Please let us know if we can be of assistance or if you 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 [olmcfinfo2@aol.com](mailto:olmcfinfo2@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, or for more information on workshops, DVDs, speakers, and our [Resource Binder](#).



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

**Donate**  
to NCPD

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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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