



# Mental Illness Network News

The Monthly Newsletter of the  
National Catholic Network on Mental Illness



## DECEMBER 2013



The Gifts of the Shepherds



On Pope Francis' letter,  
*The Joy of the Gospel*

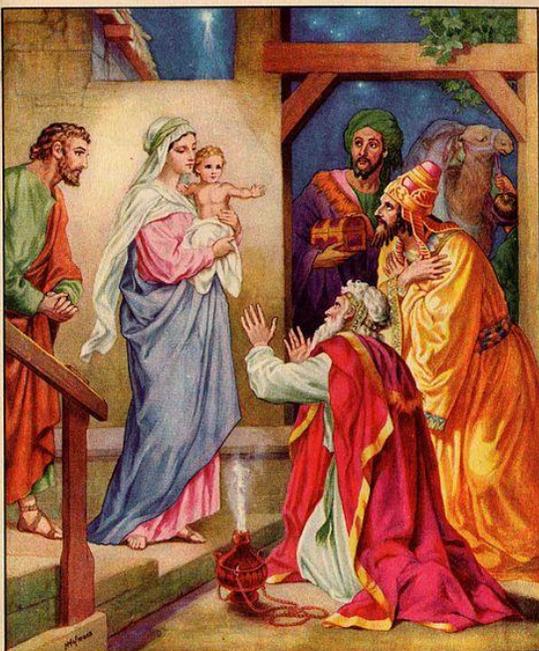


Notes from the  
NCPD Meeting in Houston



*Welcomed and Valued  
Resource Manual now  
Available in Spanish*

## The Gifts of the Shepherds



THE VISIT OF THE WISE-MEN

At the First Christmas who brought the presents? Everyone knows it was the Wise Men, and the gifts were pretty good ones too, rare and expensive and from far away. You see them on the Christmas cards and holiday displays along with the brightly lit angels singing away. If you look at the edges you can usually see the shepherds as often as not upstaged by some cute and cuddly little lamb. Maybe we should think a little bit more about the Shepherds. The Angels told of a great mystery in Bethlehem and they decided to leave their responsibilities and travel in the dark to see what was happening. It's not hard to imagine that seeing Mary exhausted from labor and Joseph worried about providing for a newborn they offered them some

reassurance and kept them company for a while. In this perplexing moment they brought the invaluable gift of themselves.

Christmas is a happy, joyful, stressful time of the year. For persons with mild or moderate forms of mental illness or those who are more severely and persistently ill but in recovery it's a tough time. People are tired and worried about small things and it rubs off on those vulnerable to the moods of others. Yesterday at the local megamart the baking aisle was full of people with lists looking for those special baking or candy ingredients bought once a year. A young woman was standing in front of the chocolates, studying a recipe card. An older woman said to her that she looked a bit puzzled and could she help. After a brief consultation the younger woman left with what she needed and looked a bit relieved. Her helper probably thought no more about it. She did not know why that recipe was important, who it was being made for or anything else about it, but she did offer the gift of the Shepherds, for a brief moment she was present to someone who was troubled and eased her mind.

We can't as individuals fix most of the problems faced by persons with a mental illness. Reuniting families, removing troubling thoughts and fears, or arranging for perfection is beyond us. But like the Shepherds who did not understand what was going on that night in Bethlehem, we can offer our presence and attention. We can look at people for whom there is no room in the Inn, or the family, or the community and see them, and listen if even only for the time it takes to reassure someone in the baking aisle of the store. Pope Francis reminds us that when we see our neighbor we see the Image of God. The Shepherds did not know it but that night they saw God. Let's be like the shepherds this Christmas and offer our gift of presence and attention to strangers and friends. And in this way encounter God.

Ann Sherzer  
Co-Chair NCPD's Council on Mental Illness

Picture Credit: Wikimedia Commons/ Public Domain

## **ON POPE FRANCIS' LETTER *THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL***



Pope Francis pointed out in his recent letter on evangelization that the great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is desolation, anguish and a blunted conscience. He says whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of

God's love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. Sometimes in our ministry we may feel like John the Baptist, a voice crying out in the wilderness of a world wrapped up in its own self-interest.

The deep joy of Christmas and throughout the year comes when we make Christ real to someone who society has ignored, forgotten or abandoned. Don't our hearts leap with joy when we reach out to someone who might otherwise not have someone to talk to or as we offer a healing presence in someone's life. We have so much to offer to others and we have so much to learn from the people we reach out to. Our gift of love, mirroring God's love, becomes a circular gift of love that keeps on giving and keeps on returning. It is the true spirit of Christmas - Christ among us. God bless you for all you do throughout the year.

Deacon Tom Lambert  
Co-Chair NCPD's Council on Mental Illness

## Notes from the NCPD Meeting in Houston



The NCPD national conference last November in Houston TX was a sign of hope for those working for the full inclusion of persons with mental illness in the Church.

The Council on Mental Illness hosted a day-long pre-conference gathering attended by persons from around the country. In addition to persons with mental illness and family members, priests deacons, and diocesan staff

members from across the country were present. Topics covered included a basic introduction to mental illness, models of ministries that have successfully addressed the concerns of families and persons with mental illness, the work of the Network and a showing the DVD *Welcomed and Valued*. The day ended with a presentation on top ten actions a parish can take. Participants were



then asked to commit themselves to one action to improve the spiritual lives of persons with mental illness and their families.

The conversation continued throughout the conference in many individual encounters at the Council on Mental Illness display table as well as presentation by members. Deacon Tom Lambert and Fr. Bob Malloy facilitated at a session with clergy discussing their questions and concerns about disabilities including mental illness, Lissette Mira-Amaya presented information on mental illness in a Spanish speaking session and later joined Tom Lambert in an English session on the needs of families touched by mental illness. Fr. Bob Malloy and Jim McCollum a local attorney from Houston facilitated a session on mental illness and spirituality. We received very positive feedback on all the sessions.

For many people it was a chance to share their gifts and concerns about mental illness and the Church as well as exchange ideas, resources and offer encouragement in an open environment.

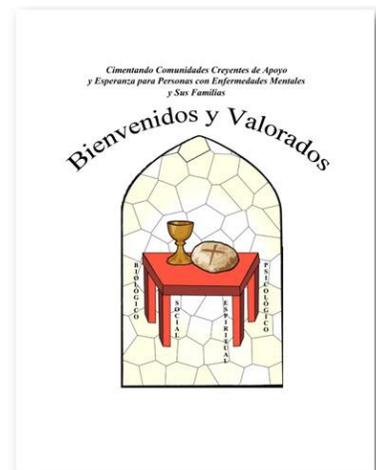
Ann Sherzer  
Co-Chair NCPD's Council on  
Mental Illness



## ***Welcomed and Valued Resource Manual*** **Now Available in Spanish**



**Click here to access a Spanish edition of  
the *Welcomed and Valued Resource Manual*.**



# Links to Mental Health Organizations



[www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org)



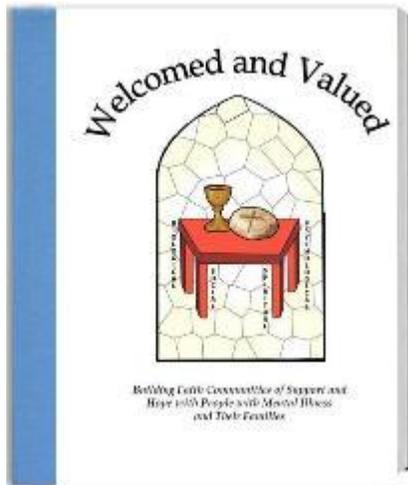
## FROM THE EDITOR

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](mailto: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, or for more information on workshops, DVDs, speakers, and our [Resource Binder](#).

## Welcomed and Valued: Mental Illness Resource Manual and DVD



The Resource Manual features 90+ pages of information, perspectives and tools to assist in the ministry with people with mental illness.

The DVD features in depth looks at people with mental illness and how they participate in parish life. (27-minute open captioned DVD)  
Discussion guide included.

[Click here](#) for a free download of the Resource Manual. [Click here](#) for purchase options.

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

### 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.

National Catholic Partnership on Disability  
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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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