

Welcoming and Appreciating People with Mental Illness As Valued Members of the Parish Community

Every parish has members who experience a serious mental illness or who have a close friend or family member who does. With this reality in mind, every parish must thoughtfully consider how it more fully can welcome people affected by mental illness into the life of the community in a way that values their gifts and contributions to the church family.

Recognize

Recognizing that some people in the parish are affected by mental illness can help transform these usually “invisible” conditions into visible realities in the lives of parishioners just like the realities of physical health problems.

Consider

Considering how people with mental illnesses and their loved ones might experience Mass and other components of the life of the parish can help reduce words and actions that stigmatize or exclude people with mental illness from full participation.

Include

Including people affected by mental illness can take many forms, such as: including their needs and petitions in the Prayers of the Faithful, providing accommodations for those who might not be able to tolerate staying in one place during an entire liturgy or parish event, inviting people who might be shy or withdrawn to participate in liturgical ministries or other roles within the parish, accompanying them to parish activities, and introducing them to others.

Encourage

Encouraging all the members of the parish and its staff to ask questions and learn more about the effects of mental illness can increase their ability to respond in the most compassionate and pastorally appropriate manner.

Transform

When a parish is truly welcoming people with mental illness and fully appreciating their gifts, the parish is transforming itself and the whole Church into the inclusive and loving community it is called by Christ to be.

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