

Mental Health MINISTRY

Education, Accompaniment, Advocacy

PARISH IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES



MISSION

Mental Health Ministry has been established to accompany those with mental health needs in our parish and school communities in a catholic, sustainable, ethical, and meaningful way. The focus of this ministry is education, accompaniment, and advocacy.

THE “WELL”

Just as Jesus accompanied the Woman at the Well, your parish is a safe haven where people can come together to pray, be heard, access resources, and journey towards wellness. As the Bishop says, "From the Well to Wellness." Your parish's Well space can be customized to reflect your community's unique atmosphere and become a peaceful place for prayer, reflection, and support groups.

A WELL IS POWERED IN 4 WAYS

- **CONNECT:** Connect with the Diocesan Office of Mental Health Ministry.
- **DEVELOP:** Work together on developing the structure for your mental health ministry.
- **TRAIN:** Plunge into educational opportunities that provide a solid foundation of mental health literacy.
- **ENGAGE:** Serve the needs of your community.



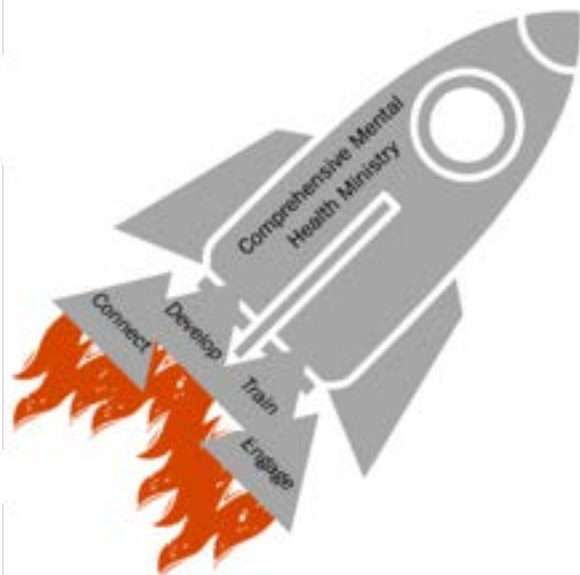


The Office of Mental Health Ministry is not a clinical resource and is not intended to serve as a substitute for treatment or counseling with a qualified professional. We do not diagnose or treat mental illness, but rather serve as an avenue to provide literacy in mental health to promote the reduction of mental illness stigma, encourage conversations around mental illness, and create a safe environment for individuals to share and seek help surrounding their mental illness (Catholic Mental Health Ministry Guidelines, 2019). Our mission is to help create pastoral environments where people living with mental illness can meet, share their experiences and their Catholic faith with others, and to grow spiritually in their relationship with God.

Remember, you are not alone.

READY FOR LIFT OFF?

Your ministry is a rocket and these are the booster engines propelling it forward. You can get the rocket moving with any one of the boosters, but it takes all four to have maximum effect.



ROCKET BOOSTER ONE: CONNECT

THE OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH MINISTRY

The Office of Mental Health Ministry was inaugurated on December 13, 2022, thanks to a generous gift from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust.

The Office exists to provide meaningful support to those with mental health needs in our parishes, schools, and broader community in a Catholic, sustainable and ethical way.

The Office of Mental Health Ministry, and mental health ministries in parishes, are not clinics or intended to serve as substitutes for treatment or counseling with a qualified professional. Rather, the focus of these ministries is education, accompaniment, and advocacy and connecting people to the resources they may need. To connect with the staff or find resources, visit the **Office of Mental Health Ministry** website at dphx.org/mentalhealth or scan the **QR code**.



THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING A WELL BEGINS BY THE PASTOR ENGAGING WITH THE DIOCESAN OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH MINISTRY

Developing a Well begins with the approval of leadership. At the parish level, that is the pastor. Many pastors have worked with the Office of Mental Health Ministry to start Wells in their parishes. If the initial desire for a Well surfaces from parishioners, the connection between the diocesan office and the pastor must occur before any further progress can be made.



THE ROLE & RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PASTOR

The Office of Mental Health Ministry will meet with the pastor to discuss the plans to implement the ministry at their parish. The Pastor will be responsible for:

- **Supporting the Mental Health Ministry (MHM) within the parish.**
- Appointing a MHM Ministry Leader.
- When appropriate, including mental health issues in homilies so that the parish becomes more inclusive in supporting those who live with mental illness.
- Providing for the inclusion of information about the MHM in the bulletin and other forms of communication.
- Including petitions for those living with mental illness in the Prayers of the Faithful especially during months set aside for Mental Health Awareness.
- Receiving periodic updates on group meetings and events from the MHM Coordinator.
- Communicating suggestions for improvement or concerns to the Mental Health Ministry Coordinator as needed.
- Being informed of issues arising from MHM meetings or group members and, where needed, participating in their resolutions with the MHM Coordinator.
- Maintaining the confidentiality of people seeking assistance.
- Participating in a group meetings or social activities as appropriate and as availability allows.
- Providing MHM with the same opportunities, benefits, and resources as other parish ministries.

The pastor will work on building a **Parish Mental Health Ministry Team** and can make an announcement after mass or in their bulletin to let their community know about the plans to implement such ministry.





The MHM Coordinator is a volunteer position within a parish responsible for:

- Living the mission of Christ by supporting mental health education, accompaniment, and advocacy.
- Connecting individuals and families to community resources.
- Adhering to parish and school policies for the protection of minors, including maintaining Safe Environment Training and Background Check.
- Serving as the point of contact for the Diocesan Office of Mental Health Ministry and local parish needs.
- Leading efforts to provide trainings, support groups, speaker series, etc., under the pastor's direction.
- Participating in meetings with Diocesan Mental Health Ministry Coordinators.

Qualifications and Skills:

- No specialized educational background is required for this position.
- Basic knowledge of technology (office software, virtual meetings, etc.).
- Ability to maintain confidentiality and privacy.
- Effective communication skills for small and large groups.



ROCKET BOOSTER TWO: DEVELOP

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

A successful Mental Health Ministry will look different in each parish or organization. Areas of consideration would include community engagement, visible pastoral accompaniment, a clear ministry plan and a dedicated team. **Consult the Resource Appendix for examples of three different levels of ministerial success.**

EXPECTATIONS OF THE TEAM

Mental Health Ministers realize that they are not clinicians and do not treat or diagnose. They help people feel seen, heard, and valued. They are up to date on Safe Environment and Mental Health First Aid Training. Good team members know the resources available in their community and help guide others to them. They seek pastoral approval and work in collaboration with the pastor and parish leadership team to ensure that everyone is aligned with the mission.

DETERMINING NEEDS & GOALS

The importance of listening:

One of the tasks of the MHM Team is to identify the needs of their parish community. What mental health challenges are most prevalent and what support systems do parishioners want?

The Diocesan Office has developed easy to facilitate listening sessions that help small groups come together and discuss the state of mental health in their parish or community. These conversations will shed light on what types of challenges are presenting themselves and what resources may be available. When you are ready to employ listening sessions in your parish, contact the Diocesan Office to coordinate.



SUPPORT AVAILABLE FROM THE DIOCESE OF PHOENIX OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH MINISTRY

Accompaniment:

Meeting people where they are. Creating safe spaces and offering support groups for those experiencing a mental health challenge and those who care for them. We want to accompany, offer support, understanding and prayers and connect to community resources as needed.

Education:

Training for clergy, parish ministry, laity, and Diocesan Pastoral Center staff on mental health literacy. Education events around various mental health topics to help promote the reduction of mental illness stigma and how to respond to suicide.

Advocacy:

Amplifying the voices of those experiencing mental health challenges. Addressing the social determinants of mental health. Partnering with coalitions and civic leaders to connect resources, enact strong policies, and assure that mental health is at the forefront of discussions.

EDUCATION

- Mental Health First Aid training in English and Spanish
- Expert guest speakers on a variety of topics

ACCOMPANIMENT

- Support and resources for Wells
- Start-up and sustaining assistance for parish-based group programs

ADVOCACY

- Listening session facilitation
- Connections to organizations and resources
- Impacting policy
- Building civic and interfaith coalitions

MAKE A SIMPLE PLAN

Although your plan will be guided by the three pillars of education, accompaniment, and advocacy, you should not feel pressure to try to do everything. You and your parish have unique needs, gifts, and talents. (a detailed sample plan is available in the Resource Appendix)



ROCKET BOOSTER THREE: TRAIN



BENEFITS OF TRAINING

To establish an effective Mental Health Ministry Team, it's crucial to have a solid foundation in Mental Health Literacy. This concept essentially refers to an individual's understanding and perceptions regarding mental health issues. The five core elements of Mental Health Literacy include: (1) identifying mental health disorders and symptoms of psychological distress; (2) understanding risk factors, causes, and treatment options; (3) being aware of the mental health support services available in the community; (4) fostering attitudes and beliefs that promote seeking help; and (5) recognizing when to seek mental health information and advice.

Training allows the MHM team to be confident in their ministry and to connect people with the most effective resources.

BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

The pastor and Office of Mental Health Ministry can collaborate on scheduling dates to provide Mental Health First Aid Training as the foundational training for the Parish Team and others interested in attending. The Adult or Youth Mental Health First Aid training can be offered in English or Spanish. As your foundation is built, you can take advantage of other educational opportunities to enrich your ministry.

SPECIALIZED SUPPORT

As you get to know the giftedness of your team and the needs of your community better, you may find that you are well positioned to fill a certain niche. Some parish communities might have a special focus on grieving, others may have a large foster care community, and others an outreach to veterans or migrants. There are programs, training, and speakers available on a wide variety of mental health topics. The Diocesan office is here to support and empower you in meeting the needs that present themselves.



YOU'RE READY
TO GO!



ROCKET BOOSTER FOUR: ENGAGE

Ensure that all those who come into first contact with parishioners like receptionists, facilities workers, clergy, and other parish staff know how to connect people with the mental health ministry.

COMMUNICATE:

Consider the following options on how to inform your parish community about the mental health ministry and what you offer.

- Use space in your bulletin, Flocknote, social media, or newsletters.
- Hold a fellowship gathering after Mass.
- Have a Well open house.

RESOURCES TO HAVE AT THE READY:

Everyone associated with MHM should know and be constantly reminded that anyone under mental distress should **call or text 988**.

They will be connected directly with a mental health professional. Calls are available in English and Spanish and are also in other languages through live translation. Text is currently only available in English.

988 is completely free and people who contact 988 do not need to provide any personal data or immigration status to receive services.

If it is needed, mental health response teams can be dispatched anywhere in the state of Arizona.

Additionally, if you are located in the Phoenix Metro, there is a mental health urgent care called **Mind 24/7** that has two locations that anyone can walk into and receive care. Additionally, **Connections** in downtown Phoenix provides those same services.

The Office of Mental Health Ministry has also created lists of **mental health services and providers** that are a part of each Well's onboarding materials.



GROUP EXPERIENCES

In the **Resource Appendix**, you will find a list of group programs that are available.

Mental Health Ministry Spiritual Support Group Meetings can be offered to support people who are living with a mental illness and to the caregivers, often parents, who are supporting a loved one who lives with a mental illness. It is important to realize that these are spiritual support meetings, not clinical support group meetings. Spiritual support groups provide spiritual and social support leading to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. At a spiritual support group meeting, participants are offered accompaniment to journey with others as they experience God (The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, 2024).

Bishop Dolan's vision is to meet our brothers and sisters where they are and to accompany one another by creating pastoral environments such as The Well, a designated space or room at a parish or school that is a safe space, a place of encounter for those experiencing challenges to gather and share their experiences and grow their relationship with God. A place for support groups, educational workshops, and opportunity for accompaniment.



RESOURCE APPENDIX



Contents:

- Sample Plan
- Education Information
- Guidelines for Spiritual Support Meetings
- MHM Meeting Agenda
- Liturgical Considerations & Prayers of the Faithful
- Preaching Points Legal & Ethical Issues
- Mandated Reporting
- Self-Care, Self-Compassion, & Self-Love

Sample Plan Outline

Fill in with your specific info

LEVEL ONE

Education:

- Mental Health First Aid Training – Clergy and Ministry Leader
- Fewer than 4 events a year

Accompaniment:

- Clergy/lay ministers may be available for accompaniment
- MHM Team has identified local providers and resources in order to make appropriate referrals
- Foster relationships to develop a safe and sacred space (with or without a tangible “well”) on the parish property or school campus where people can receive pastoral care and feel supported and respected without judgement
- Create a quiet space for personal reflection and prayer

Advocacy:

- Share and connect people to community services
- Have at least 1 series of listening sessions around mental health challenges and parish needs

Operations:

- Limited budget and time-limited funding (i.e., grant or gift)
- Pastor is aware and supportive of the ministry

LEVEL TWO

Education:

- MHFA Training – most team members certified
- Minimal record of ministry work documented
- Minimal evidence of ministry impact (i.e., numbers of events held per year and attendance data)
- Between 4-11 events per year

Accompaniment:

- MHM Team is aware of accompaniment at the parish and refers to outside resources as needed.

Advocacy:

- Have at least 2 synodal listening sessions per year around mental health challenges and parish needs

Operations:

- Prepare for articulated next year budget
- Pastor is supportive of the ministry, attending up to 3 meetings or events per year

LEVEL THREE

Education:

- MHFA Training – required to serve on MHM Team
- Articulated, detailed, organized record of ministry work documented
- Assess and evaluate progress
- Monthly events

Accompaniment:

- Specific MHM Team members are identified to facilitate support groups and also provide individual accompaniment understanding we do not treat or diagnose
- All referral communications are within a secure, confidential environment.

Advocacy:

- Develop a team who would be advocates in the public square for mental health awareness and wellness (i.e., local partners, legislature)

Operations:

- Articulated budget with reliable funding streams to ensure sustainability of MHM activities after expiration of grant or gifts
- Pastor is fully engaged in the ministry, attending up to 6 meeting or events per year and speaks on behalf of the ministry at events or from the pulpit



Mental Health First Aid Training for Youth and Adults

The Office of Mental Health Ministry offers certified Mental Health First Aid Training which is a mental health literacy course that helps people identify and respond to mental health challenges.

Consult the Office of Mental Health Ministry website for the latest training dates and locations.

Guest Speakers on a Variety of Topics

If your Mental Health Ministry has identified a particular need, connect with the diocesan Office and we can suggest experts and speakers who align with your educational needs.

General Guidelines for Spiritual Support Meetings

Spiritual support meetings are designed to provide a space for individuals to explore their spirituality, share experiences, and support one another. Here are some general guidelines to help facilitate these meetings effectively:

- **Leadership:** The group should choose who will lead the presentations and discussions, focusing on the presenter rather than themselves. Questions and comments should be brief and focused.
- **Listening:** It is important for listeners to mirror what they hear rather than fix problems. The goal is to create a supportive environment where everyone can share without judgment.
- **Community and Connection:** These meetings offer a sense of belonging and support from like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community and connection.
- **Spiritual Exploration:** Participants are encouraged to deepen their understanding of spirituality and explore different practices.
- **Self-Reflection and Growth:** Guided meditations, discussions, and workshops create opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth.
- **Stress Reduction and Inner Peace:** Spiritual practices like meditation can promote relaxation, reduce stress, and foster inner peace.
- These guidelines aim to create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere where individuals can engage in meaningful spiritual exploration



MHM Meeting Opening Statement:

The Mental Health Ministry serves to support, encourage, and pray with and for people who live with mental illness. We come together to share our faith life and experiences with one another as we also seek to grow spiritually closer to our loving God.

We are people who strive to follow and imitate Jesus Christ in all we say and do. We are committed to what our Catholic Church believes and teaches about faith and morals in answer to our human search for truth and love and we are eager to share the good news of the Gospel. We offer prayer, spiritual support and comfort in a group setting.

This meeting is not a group counseling or therapy session. We do not take on the roles of psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, or therapists. We do not provide diagnosis or prescribe medications. If anyone is under the care of a doctor and/or taking medications, they need to continue doing so because this group is not a substitute for medical care or counseling.

The taking of any illegal drugs is also a cause for removal from the group. Inappropriate or disruptive behavior, violence or abusive language is not permitted when participating in the group. If such an action occurs, the member may be asked to leave the group. During our meetings, we promise to respect one another by listening carefully to what is being said and by not carrying on side conversations.

We pledge ourselves to be open and honest in sharing information with one another. We promise to hold everything said in our meetings in strict confidence and will not share it with anyone outside of our group. The only exception is should anyone look to hurt either themselves or others, the team leader has a mandated obligation in accordance with the law to ensure that the member receives proper help and support.

As we begin our sharing, please introduce yourself and tell us on a scale of 1 (lowest) – 10 (highest) how you are feeling currently. We will use this as a guide to help determine the order in which people will speak during this part of the meeting.



Agenda for Mental Health Spiritual Group Meeting

1. Prior to meeting (15 Minutes)

- a. Facilitator places the saint picture and/or other devotionals at the front of the room.
- b. Facilitator places drinks on counter and turns on coffee (Snacks for the break are not put out yet).

2. Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

- a. Start with a short prayer and Our Father and Hail Mary.
 - b. Review Ground rules – have handouts available if needed.
 - c. Emphasize confidentiality and no dominating the conversation.
- Not therapy but spiritual support.

3. Round 1 - Brief introductions – If there is someone new to the group ask how they found out about the group. (5 to 10 minutes)

4. Round 2 - Sharing (30 to 40 minutes)

- a. Go around and give each participant the opportunity to say how they are doing or allow them to pass.
- b. Encourage supportive discussion – but not advice. Comments can be “When I had that issue this is what helped me;” Not “I think you should try this.”

5. Break (15 minutes) Put out snacks and social time.

6. Spiritual Reflection (30 minutes) - NOTE: This will be a primary responsibility of the facilitator – to regularly search for reliable resources that can be used.

- a. Call attention to Saint picture and other devotionals.
- b. Distribute Spiritual Reflection Resource. One of the following:
 - i. Scripture reading with questions/comments to stimulate reflection.
Christ in Our Neighborhood - The Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix (dphx.org)
 - ii. Gospel reading for the week.
 - iii. Reflection on a Church document on mental illness.
(such as NY State Bishops statement)
 - iv. Extended prayer such as the rosary or chaplet of divine mercy.
 - v. Other resources as discovered by Facilitator.

7. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. Prayer to a patron saint of mental health (such as St. Dymphna).
- b. Distribute prayer notes and ask participants to write down any prayer intentions.
- c. Put in prayer box.
- d. Close with a short prayer and Our Father and Hail Mary (blessing if clergy is present).



Liturgical Considerations & Prayers of the Faithful

The realities of mental health issues and illnesses need to be recognized and incorporated into the liturgy and worship of the church. In Mass and other worship services we can acknowledge that many parishioners are facing mental health challenges so that they understand that they are welcomed and supported by their parish community.

We can break down the stigma associated with mental health challenges by affirming during public worship services the significant role that the Church has in ministering to people with mental health challenges.

We can do as Pope Francis has asked by remembering those who live with mental health challenges and “pray for them and their families, so that they are never left alone, or discriminated against, but instead are welcomed and supported” (The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, 2024).

These intercessions can be used throughout the year, especially during Suicide Awareness Month (September) and Mental Health Month (May) in liturgies and prayer services for those who grieve the loss of a loved one to suicide.

SET ONE:

God is the source of our strength and our hope. With confidence, let us bring our prayers before the Lord.

For our Church, that her shepherds and faithful will see the suffering Christ in those with mental health challenges and grow ever closer to him through loving care and compassion,

We pray to the Lord.

For those who have financial resources, power, and influence. That they be renewed in their steadfast commitment to serve those who are most vulnerable and continue to grow in their identities as beloved children of God apart from any worldly success.

We pray to the Lord.

For Christians everywhere. That we would recognize the human dignity and inherent beauty in every brother and sister who suffers from mental health challenges. May there be a deeper understanding that mental illness does not represent moral failure.

We pray to the Lord.

Reader: That those who are suffering in mind or body will find healing and consolation through our care and support.

We pray to the Lord.

O God, you have given us a share in the good things of heaven and earth.

Hear our prayers that we may welcome you into our midst and make known your saving deeds.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.



SET TWO:

For our Pope, our Bishop, our priests, deacons, and lay Catholic ministers, that they bring the healing presence of Christ's peace into the lives of those who are suffering with suicidality and into the lives of those who are grieving for suicide.

We pray to the Lord.

For our elected officials to come to an understanding of the need for laws, policies, and funding for effective mental health care and suicide prevention programs.

We pray to the Lord.

For the psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists and all who research the causes of suicidality and provide treatment to people who are suicidal, may God grant them wisdom and compassion.

We pray to the Lord.

For those living with a mental illness, depression, and suicidal thoughts, may they find the help and support that they need to lead peaceful and full lives.

We pray to the Lord.

We commend your mercy and defense to all who are contemplating suicide on this day. Bring someone or something to intervene.

We pray to the Lord.

For families and friends experiencing the loss of a loved one by suicide, may they find healing and comfort in your Church.

We pray to the Lord.

For the repose of the souls of our fellow parishioners, our family members, and neighbors who have died by suicide. May they experience the mercy and love of Christ.

We pray to the Lord.

We lift all those who have died by suicide and the fathers and mothers, friends, and families who are now living as survivors of suicide.

We pray to the Lord.

Gracious and loving God, for all the families who have lost a loved one to suicide, bring them comfort in trusting that your mercy and grace accept their loved one into the eternal bliss of heaven.

We pray to the Lord.



SET THREE:

Prayers of the Faithful for Mental Health Awareness Month (May)

For persons with a mental illness, and their families to find effective treatment for their illness and understanding and acceptance from others.

We pray to the Lord.

For families who strive to understand and help their loved ones with mental illness, Loving God, lift their burdens, calm their anxiety, and quiet their fears.

We pray to the Lord.

For the Church and public agencies to act with justice and to ensure the availability of necessary supportive services to aid in the recovery of persons who live with mental health concerns.

We pray to the Lord.

For all who provide services for persons whose lives are affected by mental illness – social workers, counselors, mental health professionals, pastoral caregivers – that they will bear witness to God’s spirit of love.

We pray to the Lord.

For each of us to reach out with compassion to those who experience mental illness so that they may know that they are not alone.

We pray to the Lord.

For persons who suffer from depression or burn-out, that they will find support and a light that opens them up to life.

We pray to the Lord.

For all persons who themselves or within their families live with mental illness, that the joy and love of Jesus may bring them comfort.

We pray to the Lord.

For people with mental illness who are confined in jails and prisons or who live on the streets without homes or hope.

We pray to the Lord.



SET FOUR:

Prayers of the People

Let us pray to the Father of Mercies: Father, we pray for the unity and mission of the holy Church of God; that it may welcome and serve those who live with a mental illness.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Guide us, the citizens and leaders of this land, this state, and this city ... that we may unite to provide for and protect the poor, the homeless and those who suffer in mind, body and spirit.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Forgive us when we knowingly or unknowingly ridicule, look in disgust, neglect or discriminate against those who are mentally ill.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Comfort and relieve those who are troubled in mind and spirit. Bring them hope, peace and the consolation of a loving community.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Grant patience and courage to the families and friends of those who are ill. Increase their perseverance as they face challenges to recovery for their loved one.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Protect and defend those living with mental illness from exploitation, addictions, and abuse.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Walk with the homeless and missing persons, those who are destitute and have no one to care. Forgive us for our indifference.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We commend to your mercy and defense all who are contemplating suicide today, right now. Bring someone or something to intervene.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For the families who have lost a loved one to mental illness, bring them comfort in trusting that your grace accepts their ill loved one, despite the final desperate act that brought them into your loving arms.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Empower us to speak up for those who do not have a voice; save us from making peace with the injustices in the social systems that have failed them.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.



Guide those who do research for the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses; uphold them with your compassion and diligence.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those who are in recovery and for treatments that enable them to return to full and rewarding lives, we give you thanks.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, Giver of life and health, we trust that in your time and way, you will dispel all darkness with your light, all confusion with your order, all fear with your peace. Through Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Adapted from and patterned after Prayers of the People from the Book of Common Prayer.

Points to Assist Preaching

Hope and Healing (Bishops of California, 2018)

“As pastors and bishops, we are deeply concerned with the heartbreaking prevalence of mental illness in our society and are taking action to address this tragic form of misery and sorrow. Though not as apparent and familiar as general medical problems, mental illness is equally important and is uniquely challenging and burdensome. It strikes deep within the human soul, impacting and influencing a person’s thoughts, emotions and behaviors; thereby affecting all aspects of a person’s life; work and rest, family life and relationships, prayer and one’s relationship with God.”

For I Am Lonely and Afflicted (New York Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2014)

“In our society, those with mental illness are often stigmatized, ostracized and alone. The suffering endured by mentally ill persons is a most difficult cross to bear, as is the sense of powerlessness felt by their families and loved ones. As the Psalmist called on God to deliver him from affliction and distress, so, too, does the person with mental illness cry out for healing. Our Judeo-Christian tradition calls us to be witnesses of God’s love and mercy and to be instruments of hope for these individuals.”

Mentally Ill Are Also Made in God's Image (St. Pope John Paul II, 1996)

“Whoever suffers from mental illness ‘always’ bears God’s image and likeness in himself, as does every human being. In addition, he ‘always’ has the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such.”



Hope and Healing (Bishops of California, 2018)

“We clearly proclaim that there is no shame in receiving a diagnosis of a psychiatric disorder, and we affirm the need for education in our communities to remove the unjust prejudice and stigma often associated with mental illness. Catholics should be the first among all to witness to the truth of the dignity of every human person, so as to live in love and solidarity with our neighbor.”

Therapy and the Church’s Mission (Idaho Catholic Register, 2025)

“The Church’s mission has always been to care for the whole person. From hospitals and hospices to confessionals and counseling offices, the Church offers paths to healing. Mental health care is simply a continuation of this tradition, drawing on both spiritual and scientific insights to restore what is wounded. If you’re struggling emotionally or mentally, seeking therapy does not mean your faith has failed. On the contrary, it can be a profound act of humility, trust, and cooperation with God’s grace. We are not meant to journey alone. God often works through the hands and wisdom of others—therapists included.”

Legal & Ethical Issues in Mental Health Ministry

The Diocese of Phoenix has outlined expectations for all clergy, pastoral counselors, volunteers and lay ministers. We are called to adhere to parish and school Policy and Procedure for the Protection of Minors by maintaining up to date Safe Environment Training and Background Check.

Timely referrals to Mental Health Professionals:

Mental health ministers are not expected to treat mental health conditions but learn to recognize the signs and symptoms and have open conversations with the individual(s) who may benefit from a referral to professional mental health treatment. Keep a list of mental health professionals at hand or visit the Office of Mental Health Ministry website for a resource list of mental health professionals.

Mental Health Professionals:

The Mental Health Ministers who hold active professional licenses should consider the legal and ethical boundaries set by their licensing agency to help limit the potential for dual relationships and confusion of the lay ministerial relationship on the part of the parishioner (Callahan, PhD et al., 2019). They will be supporting in ministry and not therapy when facilitating support groups or accompaniment. You can verify the mental health professional’s license and good standing by visiting:

The [Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners](http://azbbhe.us) at azbbhe.us or the [Arizona Board of Psychology Examiners](http://psychboard.az.gov) at psychboard.az.gov.



Mandated Reporting

Mandated reporters are required by law, as defined by ARS 13-3620, to report all concerns of child abuse or neglect.

Arizona Department of Child Safety

1-888-SOS-CHILD (1-888-767-2445)

Or online Report Child Abuse or Neglect | Arizona Department of Child Safety (az.gov)

Arizona Adult Protective Services

To report adult abuse, neglect and exploitation you can report online or by calling 1-877-767-2385.

The legal and ethical issues in providing support services in mental health at a church are multifaceted and require careful consideration. Here are some key points to consider:

Confidentiality: Maintaining confidentiality is crucial in the therapeutic relationship. Church staff should ensure that clients' personal information is kept private and that clients feel safe sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Informed Consent: Clients must be provided with all relevant information about their treatment and have the autonomy to make informed decisions about their care.

Professional Boundaries: It is essential to maintain professional boundaries to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure the best interests of the clients are prioritized.

Mandatory Reporting: There are legal obligations to report suspected child or elder abuse, and church staff should be aware of these requirements.

Ethical Decision-Making: Ethical dilemmas often arise in the intersection of academic, research, and mental health ethical codes. Church staff should be prepared to make informed decisions that uphold the dignity of clients and the integrity of the church. By addressing these legal and ethical issues, church staff can provide a supportive and safe environment for individuals seeking mental health support. It is important to stay informed about the latest developments in these areas to ensure the provision of high-quality care.



Self-Care, Self-Compassion, and Self-Love

Your wellness is important and how you take care of yourself will determine how you minister to others.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” Mark 12:31

Self-Compassion:

A way to be as kind and caring to ourselves and accept that our emotions are as valid as those experienced by others.

Self-Reflection:

- Talk to yourself as you would talk to a friend or loved one.
- Do not place judgment on the emotions or thoughts that you are having.
- Avoid using the word should.
- Turn off the inner critic.

Self-Love:

- Be kind to yourself by recognizing mistakes and practice telling yourself that you can overcome this challenge.
- Say words of encouragement and praise yourself for being and not for doing.

Important to consider:

- Grow in self-awareness and self-regulation of your emotions.
- Be empowered to manage yourself rather than trying to control others.
- Be trauma informed and culturally sensitive.
- Be intentionally attuned.

Eight Dimensions of Wellness is Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) wellness initiative to achieve longevity and improved quality of life. They invite individuals to do a self-assessment about wellness in the following areas and create a self-care plan.

Emotional

Physical

Spiritual

Social

Intellectual

Occupational

Environmental

Financial

Take some time to reflect on your wellness and ask for help if you need it. Asking for help is a strength. Setting healthy boundaries is important and necessary. Advocate for yourself and what you may need to help mitigate compassion fatigue and burnout.

