
California Catholic Bishops Release Major Statement on Mental Health; Call for Elimination of Stigma and Closer Ties Between Faith and Medicine

Description

SACRAMENTO, CA – May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and the California Catholic Conference of Bishops used the opportunity to release an extended pastoral letter on the culture of mental health and the critical need to attend to those who suffer.

In the document “*Hope and Healing: A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of California on Caring for those who Suffer from Mental Illness Addressed to All Catholics and People of Goodwill*” the California bishops lament the heartbreaking prevalence of mental illness in our society and the dire need to move past stigmatization toward ministry and care.

“Persons with mental illness often suffer in silence, hidden and unrecognized by others,” said the Bishops in the statement. “Consider this stark contrast: a person with a *medical* illness—such as cancer—will usually receive an outpouring of sympathy and support from their parish and community; a person diagnosed with a *mental* illness—such as depression, crippling anxiety, or bipolar disorder—frequently experiences isolation and inadequate support, often because of the unjust social stigma of mental illness. This should not be so in our civic communities, and cannot be so in our Catholic communities.”

The statement examines several facets of mental health including the current opioid crisis, suicide, addiction, and embraces the bond between science and religion.

“It is time now to build bridges between science and religion, health care and pastoral care. Clergy and health care professionals, families and mental health advocates should work together to encourage a “both-and,” rather than “either-or” approach to psychological and spiritual healing. We welcome and encourage advances in science and medicine,” the bishops said.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five adults in the U.S. suffered from a mental disorder over the past year and nearly 10 million American adults (one in 25) have a mental illness that is severe enough to cause serious functional impairment. Fully 20 percent of adolescents currently have, or previously had, a seriously debilitating mental disorder.

In *Hope and Healing*, the California bishops seek to get past the stigmas associated with mental health and eradicate the fear of engaging and interacting with those with a mental illness.

“We Christians have to get to know people, to befriend them, to listen generously to them, to walk with them,” the bishops said. “This is not because we have all the answers to their problems or can cure all of their afflictions, but simply because these encounters—these small acts of love and compassion, understanding, and friendship—are precisely what people need most.”

For those who are interested in seeking guidance, the document includes a list of mental health resources available in every archdiocese and diocese in California.

The complete document is available here – <http://www.cacatholic.org/resources/mental-health>

The California Catholic Conference is the public advocacy office of the Bishops of California. Representing the Archbishops of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and the Bishops of Fresno, Monterey, Oakland, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Jose, Santa Rosa and Stockton, it is the official voice of the 10 million Catholics and their many parishes, schools, universities, and social service agencies in California.

[Mental Health Letter – English](#) [Mental Health Letter – Spanish](#) [Mental Health Letter – Vietnamese](#)

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