

# St. Dymphna Novena

With a reflection on the Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of California on  
Caring for those who Suffer from Mental Illness

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# HOPE AND HEALING

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For nine days

Let us reflect on “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, and to pray a novena for those touched by mental illness.

(May 15 is the Feast Day of St. Dymphna, Patron of those with mental illness.)

*FROM THE BISHOPS OF CALIFORNIA*

## **1. Christ calls us to attend to those who suffer from mental illness and provide hope and healing.**

Those living with a mental illness should never bear these burdens alone, nor should their families who struggle heroically to assist their loved ones.



## Day 1

O God, we humbly beseech You through Your servant, St. Dymphna, who sealed with her blood the love she bore You, to grant relief to those who suffer from mental afflictions and nervous disorders, especially ...

[Name the mentally afflicted person here.]

Saint Dymphna, helper of the mentally afflicted, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, comforter of the despondent, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, renowned for many miracles, please hear my plea.

Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

**HOPE**  
AND HEALING

We profess that every human life is sacred, that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, a person's dignity and worth cannot be diminished by any condition, including mental illness.

FROM THE BISHOPS OF CALIFORNIA



## Day 2

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THESE CRISES OF OUR TIME REPRESENT  
AN URGENT CALL TO ALL CATHOLICS.  
WE MUST RESPOND.

***2. The scope and  
burden of mental  
illness in our society  
is enormous.***



FROM THE BISHOPS OF CALIFORNIA



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## Day 3

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through Your servant, St. Dymphna,  
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Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy  
Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall  
be, world without end. Amen.

*Let us remember that there  
is always a way forward –  
there is always hope for  
every person – no matter  
how dire the circumstances  
may appear.*

FROM THE BISHOPS OF CALIFORNIA

**HOPE**  
AND HEALING



## Day 4

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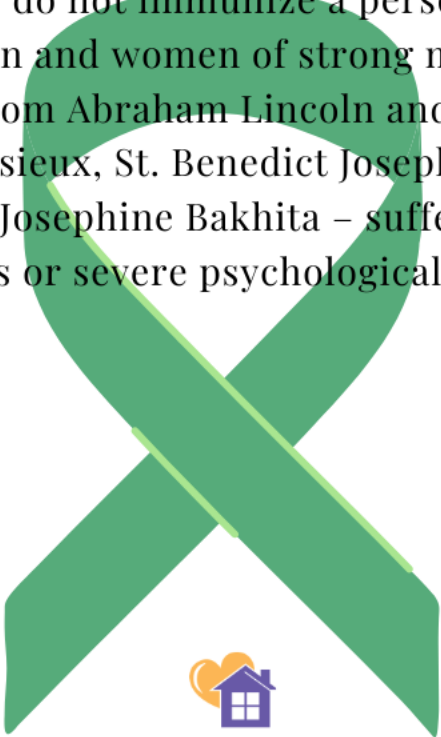
Amen.

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Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall  
be, world without end. Amen.

### 3. THOSE SUFFERING MENTAL ILLNESS SHOULD NOT BE STIGMATIZED OR JUDGED.

Mental illness is neither a moral failure nor a character defect.

To suffer from a psychiatric disorder is not a sign of insufficient faith or weakness of will. Christian faith and religious practice do not immunize a person against mental illness. Indeed, men and women of strong moral character and heroic holiness – from Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, St. Francis of Rome, and St. Josephine Bakhita – suffered from mental disorders or severe psychological wounds.



## Day 5

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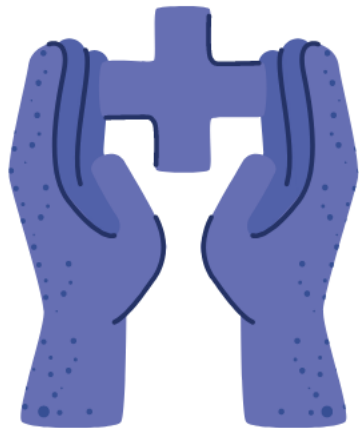
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FROM THE BISHOPS OF CALIFORNIA

## **4. The Church, health care professionals and scientific researchers should work together to improve mental health care.**

*Our model of healing is always Jesus Christ—the divine physician—who, with great tenderness, compassion and solicitude, draws close to us and binds up our wounds. Like Christ, we are called to tend to the whole person—body, mind and spirit.*



## Day 6

O God, we humbly beseech You through Your servant, St. Dymphna, who sealed with her blood the love she bore You, to grant relief to those who suffer from mental afflictions and nervous disorders, especially ...

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FROM THE BISHOPS OF CALIFORNIA

# 5. WE MUST MEET AND ATTEND TO THOSE IN NEED WHERE THEY ARE.

This outreach should be proactive rather than reactive: Managing crises is only one component. This needs to be a ministry of presence and accompaniment – an ongoing effort to seek out and engage those who suffer wherever they are found. It is also a work of education and learning – of seeing, hearing and understanding the experiences of those who suffer.

This means rolling up our sleeves and getting involved in the lives of others: helping them, accompanying them, understanding them and, thereby, showing them the love of Jesus Christ.



## Day 7

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**Pope Francis encourages Catholics not to remain securely behind the doors of our parishes, but to reach out to everyone, especially those who are marginalized and forgotten. People who suffer from severe and persistent mental illnesses are among the most misunderstood, ignored, and unjustly stigmatized members of our society. For them, our communities and parishes should be places of refuge and healing, not places of rejection or judgment.**

From the Bishops of California



## Day 8

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Amen.

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# 6. Those impacted by suicide need our compassionate response.

FOR REASONS THAT ARE BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION, SOME INDIVIDUALS SUFFER FROM SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESSES THAT PROVE DIFFICULT TO TREAT OR IMPOSSIBLE TO CURE. ...TRAGICALLY, IN SPITE OF OUR BEST EFFORTS TO ASSIST THE SUFFERING PERSON,

SOMETIMES MENTAL ILLNESS PROVES FATAL.

THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH GOES ON TO INSTRUCT US THAT "WE SHOULD NOT DESPAIR OF THE ETERNAL SALVATION OF PERSONS WHO HAVE TAKEN THEIR OWN LIVES. BY WAYS KNOWN TO HIM ALONE, GOD CAN PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SALUTARY REPENTANCE. THE CHURCH PRAYS FOR PERSONS WHO HAVE TAKEN THEIR OWN LIVES."

THOSE WHO LOSE A LOVED ONE TO SUICIDE NEED PARTICULAR CARE AND ATTENTION, OFTEN FOR CONSIDERABLE PERIODS OF TIME.

...WHILE HEALING IN THESE SITUATIONS HAPPENS ONLY VERY SLOWLY, WE MUST BE WILLING TO WALK THIS LONG ROAD WITH SUICIDE SURVIVORS, TO HELP CONSOLE THEM WITH OUR UNCONDITIONAL FRIENDSHIP AND WITH SENSITIVE PASTORAL CARE.



## Day 9

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# Additional Resources

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- The full text of the [California Bishops' Pastoral Letter](#) on Hope and Healing for Mental Health and a corresponding [study guide](#) are provided by the California Catholic Conference
- The National Catholic Partnership on Disability presents key considerations in a [pastoral response to persons with mental illness](#)
- The [Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers](#) (ACMHM) is a Lay Association of the Christian Faithful whose members are called to be a healing presence in the lives of people with mental illness

