


# Mental Health: Creating an Effective Congregational Mental Health Ministry



**Faith, Community,  
and Mental Health**

**National  
Benevolent  
Association**  
CALLED TOGETHER | CALLED TO CARE

Rev. Héctor J. Hernández Marcial M.Div., MAMTF  
Connect Coordinator / *Coordinador de Enlaces*  
Peer Group Convener, Prison and Jail Ministries;  
Hispanic Outreach Coordinator, Mental Health Initiative

Image from: <https://www.istockphoto.com/stock-photo-100481014>

1

This workshop will offer foundational mental health education for congregational use, practical strategies for building congregational based mental health ministries, and theological formation for congregations working toward countering prejudice against mental illness in our congregations. Part 1 will explore cultural norms and stigmas that exist in our congregations about mental health challenges, offer transformative ways to address these stigmas, and discuss practical ways to engage congregational culture to be more welcoming and inclusive of persons with mental health challenges.

Part 2 will offer the practical realities of starting a congregational based ministry, strategies for success, and unique pointers as to how the church can support mental health maintenance and recovery.

# Carrying the Cross:



Digital Art by: Mary Button, [marybutton.com](http://marybutton.com)

1. Acknowledge
2. Validate, Empower, Encourage, Comfort
2. Educate / Educate ourselves and our congregations
3. Refer / If you feel in over your head... you are
4. Connect - With others that are working on MH issues in your community!

2

### Listen

Allow a space for unfiltered, raw expression – people need to purge themselves of the toxic emotion and thoughts that are inside without someone doing anything with them but holding the space for them to get it out – can't critique throw up... We know it's messy and smells bad  
You can assess if this is the right task for you as they talk (time for you to consider your own time, skill, energy, desire, and appointment to help)  
Pure process can heal – sometimes people just need to get their thoughts out with someone who will gently guide the process.

### Comfort

Certain theological responses to crisis can comfort us during crisis.  
Validate – simply acknowledges the emotion... and affirm that your feelings are real and present (whether justified or not)  
Empower – points to human agency and choice in all situations and reminds us of our strength and power  
Encourage - coach, cheer leader, you can do this, you are good, you are not alone

### Refer

If you feel in over your head... you are  
Know when to let go of trying to help  
Role of a congregation or church is to be a natural support – meaning what flows naturally in human relationship in community. If you are expending extra energy and what feels like unnatural, not normal time/ effort to figure someone out, nothing works, or help someone then it's probably not an issue able to be addressed by natural community alone  
Have people or resources before hand to send people to

Integrate into everyday life of church ( examples in our sermons, mentioning diagnosis or scenarios)

Modeling openness  
Normalizing mental health through prayer language

3

# 10 Steps to Developing a Mental Health Ministry

1. Make a commitment
2. Educate Yourself
3. Get buy-in from your clergy and board of directors
4. Form a task force or ministry team
5. Decide with your team what you want to offer/accomplish
6. Define strategies for keeping the congregation, board and clergy involved
7. Make an inventory of available resources
8. Join with other organizations
9. Communicate
10. Be prepared to nurture your ministry



## Hotlines & Faith-Based Resources Líneas

Local list of Mental Health Professionals at [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com)

4



## Hotlines & Faith-Based Resources Lines

United Church of Christ Mental Health Network: [www.mhn-ucc.blogspot.com](http://www.mhn-ucc.blogspot.com)

NAMI Faithnet: [www.nami.org/FaithNet](http://www.nami.org/FaithNet)

Pathways to Promise: [www.pathways2promise.org](http://www.pathways2promise.org)

Mental Health Ministries:  
[www.mentalhealthministries.net](http://www.mentalhealthministries.net)

Interfaith Network on Mental Illness: [www.inmi.us](http://www.inmi.us)

5