

NAMI NOTES

How to bridge your spiritual and mental health

Faith and spirituality can be a very helpful component of someone's recovery from mental illness. A place of worship is often a safe place for people, where they can feel welcomed and have an instant sense of support and community. For many individuals and families, faith plays a significant role in their recovery experience.

Churches, temples, mosques and faith communities reach 70 percent of the American population each month. In the United States, clergy outnumber psychiatrists by nearly 10 to 1 and are more equitably distributed geographically than health professionals.

Many studies reveal that when faith is included in wellness planning, individuals experience shorter recovery times, fewer hospitalizations, and fewer relapses.

Education and awareness are valuable keys to shattering the silence and barriers that surround mental health treatment.

By dispelling myths, ignorance, and fear, congregations liberate persons touched by mental illness to share their struggles, seek help, regain hope, and set out on a new course toward recovery.

The church and its leadership are first choice for many individuals in times

of personal distress. During a given year, clergy see more people than psychologists and psychiatrists combined.

Each world religion has its own set of ideas and practices. If you grew up in a specific faith and feel comfortable with it, you may already have prayers and rituals that support your faith.

Ways to further practice your faith or spirituality outside of a congregation include:

- Read scripture.
- Visit sacred sites.
- Learn about important people in your religion.
- Listen to sacred music.
- Engage in private prayer.
- Attend prayer or discussion groups.

The Northeast Delta Human Services Authority and the Ruston Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness are partnering to help bring spiritual and mental health education to our local faith communities.

We suggest the following helpful tips for faith leaders:

- Realize that mental health conditions are very common. They are serious biological conditions of the

brain that fortunately can be treated.

- Realize that mental health conditions are like all other medical conditions and should be treated as such. Each condition requires an individualized treatment plan.

- Realize that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to offer their gifts, talents, and strengths to the community. Individuals living with mental health conditions are valuable community members.

- Work together to support mental health services providers.

- Use NAMI and NEDHSA resources to provide education about mental illness.

- Invite NAMI Ruston and NEDHSA members or other mental health professionals to speak to your congregation.

- Equip persons in your congregation to support individuals and families affected by mental illness through prayer, hospital and home visits, support groups, and inclusion in worship and other activities.

- Offer meeting space to NAMI Ruston or NEDHSA.
- Ask NEDHSA and

NAMI Ruston to provide referral information to mental health services and supports in your area.

- Request Sharing Hope presentations and Faith-Based Behavioral/Mental Health Summits for your congregation and community.

Faith-Based Summits

The Northeast Delta Human Services Authority hosts Faith-Based Behavioral Health Summits throughout the year. These summits are attended by pastors, ministers, health-care professionals, clinicians, public servants, law enforcement, students, families and their loved ones, and community members.

NEDHSA has held four summits this year. These summits have helped increase the understanding of behavioral/mental health issues between law enforcement and citizens who suffer from mental health and addiction issues. These summits have also helped equip clergy to cope with their own behavioral health challenges.

The most recent Faith-Based Behavioral Health Summit was held in November at the Macedonia Baptist Church in Monroe. Including the vice-president and me, five NAMI Ruston members attended this event. The next summit will be held in February or

March 2017.

NAMI Ruston and NEDHSA are partnering to host a Faith-Based Behavioral Health Summit in the Grambling or Ruston area next year. We will be seeking a church's family life center to serve as the site. If you are interested, please contact us.

Sharing Hope Presentations

Although anyone can attend, the Sharing Hope presentations were originally designed by the NAMI national headquarters for church congregations, especially those in African-American communities. One presenter is a consumer (a person living with a mental illness) who shares her testimony and path to recovery.

The second presenter is a family member of a loved one living with a mental health condition; he or she may be a faith leader. The family member provides mental health information through stories of actual families—symptoms, treatment, recovery, and support. Reference materials provided by NAMI are distributed to the participants.

Over the past few years, NAMI Ruston has hosted six Sharing Hope presentations for church congregations and associations, college students, and the communities as a whole.

Presently the Lincoln Parish Library in Ruston, Louisiana serves as the site for the Sharing Hope presentations.

Further Information

For further information and assistance, you may contact the NEDHSA Public Information Officer, Jill Hirsekorn, at (318) 362-5482 or NAMI Ruston at 247-3982.

Follow the NAMI Notes column in the Ruston Daily Leader newspaper on Wednesdays, generally every two weeks.

Resources

Major resources for this article were publications of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the Northeast Delta Human Services Authority.

Their websites are www.nami.org, www.nami.org/faithnet, www.nami.org/sharinghope, and www.nedeltahsa.org.

The executive director of NEDHSA and the founder of the Grambling Christian Center also reviewed this article.

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