



PASTORAL LETTER

Mental Health Week 2017

By The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth

28 September, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our National Mental Health Week this year begins on Saturday October 7 with Sunday October 8 being World Mental Health Day.

The theme for this year's Mental Health Week is 'Connect with Nature, Community and Self for mental wellbeing'. There is also a second complementary and culturally inclusive theme: 'Connect with Country, Community and you for strong social and emotional wellbeing'

With the population of Australia now close to 24 million, the latest statistics showing the rates of Australians aged 16 to 85 affected with common mental illnesses include

- **Anxiety disorders*** 14.4 per cent of which 10.8 per cent are male and 17.9 per cent are female
- **Depressive and Bipolar Disorders*** 6.2 per cent of which 5.3 per cent are male and 7.1 per cent are female
- **Substance Use Disorders*** 5.1 per cent of which 7 per cent male and 3.3 per cent female
- **Any mental illness*** 20.0 per cent of which 17.6 per cent male and 23.3 per cent of female

The figures and our own experience tell us that there is a growth in those affected by mental health issues. Among the factors for increasing numbers of people with mental health issues are:

- Rising unemployment;
- As workforces operate with less people, more pressure on remaining employees to increase their productivity with less resources;
- Instant communication now possible with computers and smart phones raises pressure to respond straight away;
- Substance abuse, including alcohol, grows by the minute;
- There appears to be a rising number of teenagers showing mental health issues;
- Many people incarcerated can be affected with mental health issues. Half the prison population have a mental health illness;
- Refugees living in limbo, never knowing from one day to the next what will happen to them easily develop mental health issues.



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Whatever the cause, our call, as followers of Jesus, is to care about people with mental health issues. I am sure that all of us have, at some time, encountered people with mental health issues. The stigmas unfortunately, are still with us. We hesitate to talk about these important matters. This means, in effect, that when we meet someone with a developing mental health issue, we do not know how to deliver assistance.

The question for each one of us becomes, when we meet someone with a developing mental health issue, will they see in us the face of Jesus, or will they see someone in fear?

I am sure Jesus met many people experiencing mental health issues, whom he treated with dignity and respect.

I take this opportunity to remind everyone that God loves us just as we are and that it is important to remember to pray for those experiencing mental health issues, their families and people who provide support.

It is also important to remember that those with mental illness who are required to be hospitalised, do appreciate visits from family and friends.

As a suggestion, parishes and schools can also invite people with specific knowledge to share that knowledge with their faith community. We are fortunate that our own Archdiocesan agency, the Emmanuel Centre, is in a position to offer scholarships for people in parishes, recommended by their parish priest, to undertake Mental Health First Aid courses and to become part of the Catholic Mental Health Network. This is an invaluable contribution to our care and concern for people with mental health issues.

I invite you to look carefully at the enclosed material for Mental Health Week 2017. Encourage those under your care to use Pope Francis' "Five Finger Prayer" which is enclosed. I invite you to use the enclosed prayers of the faithful for your weekend celebrations of the Eucharist on October 8. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, we too can recognise Jesus in the "Breaking of Bread" and share his compassion and love with all those we meet, especially those most in need.

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**Figures courtesy Mental Health First Aid Australia, Mental Health First Aid Manual, Edition 4, 2017.*