

Mental Illness Awareness Week

In 1990, the U.S. Congress established the first week of October as Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW). The goal is to end the stigma associated with mental illness and to ensure better understanding and access to diagnosis and treatment.

The first Tuesday of Mental Illness Awareness Week has been designated as the National Day of Prayer for Mental Illness Awareness and Understanding. The prayers and actions of both faith communities and secular organizations are needed to restore mental wellness in America. In seeking God's guidance, we can recommit ourselves to replacing misinformation, blame, fear and prejudice with truth and love in order to offer hope to all who are touched by mental illness.

Did You Know?

- One in four persons sitting in our pews has a family member struggling with mental health issues
- One in ten children and youth has a serious mental illness condition
- Fewer than one-third of adults and one-half of children who live with mental health needs receive any level of treatment in any one year
- Many individuals with a mental health issue go first to a spiritual leader for help

Ideas for Faith Communities

Our faith communities **can** be a caring congregation for persons living with a mental illness and their family member. There are many ways to begin an education program with a congregation.

- ✓ Invite a speaker or offer a workshop to teach people that mental illnesses are brain disorders
- ✓ Get educational material and referral information from groups like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the Depression Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) and Mental Health America (MHA)
- ✓ Use bulletin inserts, brochures and handouts to educate about serious mental illness
- ✓ Offer a health fair and include education about different mental illnesses
- ✓ Use liturgies, prayers and sermons to raise awareness about mental illness
- ✓ Participate in an interfaith community event for the National Day of Prayer for Understanding

People with mental problems are our neighbors. They are members of our congregations, members of our families; they are everywhere in this country. If we ignore their cries for help, we will be continuing to participate in the anguish from which those cries for help come. A problem of this magnitude will not go away. Because it will not go away, and because of our spiritual commitments, we are compelled to take action. (Rosalynn Carter)

NAMI Faithnet www.nami.org/namifaithnet
Mental Illness Awareness Week www.nami.org/miaw
Mental Health Ministries* www.mentalhealthministries.net
Pathways to Promise* www.pathways2promise.org