

NAMI FaithNet has collected descriptions of several spirituality/faith-related support groups, merely as examples. We are aware that many more excellent faith-related groups meet regularly and could have been included. NAMI FaithNet does not sponsor or endorse any particular model or type of spirituality group but encourages the interchange of ideas.

Each group described here has sprung up independently to fulfill a need in their community. These models are not intended as the best or only way of conducting such groups, but do offer examples of the “what, when, where and how.” Many of the groups were started by individual NAMI members who are passionate about the integration of faith and mental wellness. Most have a connection to their NAMI affiliate, but the groups are not necessarily sponsored by their affiliate. Some groups are sponsored by or meet in a church; one sprung up in a Community Mental Health Center that realized the relevance of faith to recovery. Facilitator’s contact information is current as of May 2013.

CROSS Ministries (*Christians Reaching Out in Support & Sharing*)

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Space has been made available to the group by a United Methodist Church in Lexington, Ky. The facilitator is a former president of NAMI Lexington, Angie O’Maley, MSW, MFT.

PURPOSE: The purpose of CROSS Ministries is for participants to share their stories and struggles, to give and receive comfort and encouragement and to open themselves to God’s presence and peace.

INVITEES: The support group members are persons who have a diagnosis of a mental illness and their family members.

FREQUENCY AND PLACE: The group meets on the first, third and fifth Monday evenings of the month, including holidays as those living with mental illness often have little or no family support. The maximum length of meetings is 90 minutes.

One of the most important tenants of CROSS Ministries is to start and end on time. The facilitator must help the group stay within a set time limit so that people will continue coming. When participants know they will not be kept beyond an allotted time by uncontrolled discussion and sharing, they will be more likely to trust the leader and commit to regular attendance.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETING: The group of about 15 meets in the lounge of the church, using chairs and a sofa in a circle. No refreshments are served except on special occasions to make the meetings simpler to run and more to the point. The facilitator welcomes people as they arrive and made use of name tags so newcomers would feel part of the group. The meetings feature:

Welcome and opening prayer by the facilitator.

A devotional offered by one of the group. This responsibility is passed around to various attendees and may include a favorite scripture verse, a poem or a short inspirational excerpt.

A summary of the group's goals wherein the facilitator reads the purpose described above.

Time to Share: Each person shares briefly their name and what they have been doing since group met last. Triumphs, challenges, needs and concerns are all encouraged to be shared. After everyone has shared, special attention may be given to one or two most in need of encouragement or support.

Closing prayer includes intercessions of both thanksgiving and requests. The prayer leader is selected in advance from among the group.

COMMENTS: Brochures describing the group are distributed throughout the community, local churches and to NAMI affiliates.

Faith and Fellowship Support Group

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago

PURPOSE: The purpose of Faith and Fellowship is to provide faith experiences in a way suited to the needs of persons affected by a mental illness within the context of a small community of believers and to offer opportunities for integration into the life and activities of the parish community. People living with mental illness are often socially isolated and even feel alienated from God. Faith and Fellowship is a ministry where persons living with a mental illness can experience the love of God and that of their sisters and brothers.

INVITEES: Faith and Fellowship groups consist of 10 to 15 adults incorporating approximately equal numbers of persons living with a mental illness and volunteers from local churches.

FREQUENCY AND PLACE: Meetings are held semi-weekly, with participants acting as partners in prayer and socialization.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETING: The meetings feature:

A time for prayer

A time for quietly shared activities

A time for a reflection on the meeting theme

Symbol

Life experience

Scripture

Music

A time for Agape, defined as “a selfless love...passionately committed to the well-being of another” (C.S. Lewis).

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Hope's Nest

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Trinity United Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, Calif.

PURPOSE: The purpose of Hope's Nest is to provide a welcome and spiritually nourishing environment, which benefits attendees far beyond just being accepted and having the opportunity to contribute. It reinforces the understanding that God is with us, even in our most difficult times.

INVITEES: Hope's Nest is a support group for those living with a mental illness. Four members from the church also attend. Although it is presented from a Christian perspective, all religions are respected and those of all faiths are welcome.

FREQUENCY AND PLACE: The group meets the first Sunday of each month from 12:30 to 2 p.m. in the church fellowship hall or a Sunday school room.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETING: Attendees greet one another and help themselves to food provided by the Disabilities Committee of the church. We gather in a circle of chairs and read the guidelines of Hope's Nest.

Each person is asked to give their name and briefly state how well they are dealing with their mental health concerns on this day. During the next twenty minutes we discuss a topic from the Bible, led by one of the attendees. An example of a discussion topic is on one of the attributes found in “The Fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23), and its application in members' lives.

After a 10-minute break, the group begins a time of sharing. Each person is given the opportunity to describe their high and low points, plus a description of something positive he or she did for someone during the previous month. After sharing, each person has the option of asking for “feedback” from others. Frequently, the feedback includes reference to a

Biblical passage, which will give comfort. Tears, prayer and laughter are all important parts of this discussion.

Prayer requests are written on cards throughout the meetings and are placed in a basket. When the gathering has concluded, attendees can take a card home to include the request in their prayers during the following month.

COMMENTS: In a recent questionnaire, attendees' responses to the question, "What meaning does Hope's Nest have for you?" included:

"I found fellowship...."

"...an opportunity to problem solve...."

"...a place to talk about issues not discussed in any other church group...."

"...to see that other Christians do experience mental illness just like me...."

"...find hope...."

"...being with people with many of my same problems and being able to openly discuss them...."

"...finding I am closer to God...."

"...knowing that what I say will not be judged, but accepted...."

"...gain understanding and support...."

"...finding a Phone Pal...."

"...discovering that people with a mental illness diagnosis can be healthy and live happy lives."

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Mental Health Family Support Group

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: St. George Episcopal Church, San Antonio

PURPOSE: Our purpose is to offer a safe and prayerful environment for people affected by mental illness to gather, and share their feelings, problems, and needs.

INVITEES: The group welcomes those living with and recovering from mental illness and their family and friends, regardless of faith. The average number of attendees in 2012 was 10 people from across the San Antonio community.

FREQUENCY AND PLACE: The Mental Health Family Support Group meets at St. George Episcopal Church every second Wednesday of the month. Meetings are from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the church conference room.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETING: Beverages and cookies are provided by the facilitator. The first three months of 2013 the group invited a speaker, and while this is not normally the case the option may be continued in the future. The typical meeting features:

Fellowship, gathering time and Introductions

An Educational Component

Devotions and Readings

Prayer and Sharing – The group prays before beginning discussion and at the end for each person sharing that night.

Closing

PUBLICITY: The electronic church newsletter, e-Spear, comes out weekly and lists all programs for the week and Sunday bulletins show future offerings of meetings. Press releases to 25 media outlets, including newspapers, radio and TV, are also distributed. There is a poster in the hallway of the parish hall area and the San Antonio Express-News publishes a notice most Mondays.

COMMENTS: We have helped several people in major ways and most of them continue to come.

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MISS (Mental Illness Spiritual Support Group)

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: NAMI Toledo, Ohio

PURPOSE: Based on National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) principles, the group focuses on sharing the truth about mental illness with a sprinkling of prayer and scripture encouragement. The aim is for participants to enjoy a more positive, joyful life despite facing the challenges that come with a misunderstood condition.

INVITEES: Those living with mental illness and their loved ones are welcome to attend, with an average group size of three to six people.

FREQUENCY AND PLACE: Meetings are held weekly on Thursday evenings from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the church conference room. No funding is necessary, as these accommodations are provided by the church.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETING: No food is provided, however members are welcome to bring snack for themselves if desired. Meetings are comprised of:

Fellowship, gathering time

Introductions and reading of NAMI Support Group guidelines, to which members have added their own supporting scripture verses.

An Educational Component

Devotions and Readings

Prayer and Sharing

Closing

RESOURCES:

NAMI E-news

FaithNet articles

National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities: Mental Illness Network

Guidebook for Overcomers Outreach: 12 Step Support Groups by Bob and Pauline Bartosch, adapted to emotional problems

[*Serenity: A Companion for Twelve Step Recovery*](#) (Hemfelt/Fowler)

Today in the Word: Daily Devotional by Moody Bible Institute, Chicago

Enjoying Everyday Life articles by Joyce Meyer

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Spirituality Support Group

SPONSORING ORGANIZATION: Adult and Child Behavioral Care (A Community Mental Health Center)

PURPOSE: The Spirituality Support Group was developed to give individuals a forum to discuss the spiritual piece of their recovery journey. Several members have commented on the value of having this forum to speak frankly and openly about their spirituality. Many feel this part of recovery has been neglected or at least minimized for those who are diagnosed with mental health conditions.

INVITEES: The group is open to both clients of Adult and Child Behavioral Care and any other members of the community affected by mental illness, regardless of faith tradition.

FREQUENCY AND PLACE: Meetings are held Tuesdays from 2 to 3 p.m. the group meets year-round, except on holidays, in one of the activity rooms at the Center.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETING: Members gather in a circle of chairs to facilitate discussion. On occasion an educational component or speaker is included, but the members themselves take a lead by introducing information and sharing their experiences. On average, about eight to 12 people attend. Meeting components include:

Fellowship, gathering time and Introductions

An Educational Component

Devotions and Readings

Prayer and Sharing

RESOURCES:

[*Spirituality, Values and Mental Health*](#) (Coyte/Gilbert/Nicholls)

[*Spirituality and Mental Health Care*](#) (Swinton)

[*Wrestling with our Inner Angels*](#) (Kehoe)

Other resources include those brought by members, such as or music, that have helped them on their journey of recovery.