



PATHWAYS TO PROMISE

Putting Faith in Mental Health Recovery

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Honoring All As Our Neighbor

Craig Rennebohm, Pathways to Promise Senior Advisor

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

I have been thinking about the stigma surrounding mental illness. Sharing the recovery journey is crucial. I spent a summer as a student chaplain with several hundred souls who were admitted to the locked inpatient psychiatric unit of a county hospital in California. Each was a person first, a unique individual, going through an extraordinary experience, which often had a spiritual dimension. I created safe space as best I could in the day room, over a meal or cup of coffee, in a hallway or visiting in the open doorway of someone's room. I had no office, did not diagnose or treat, was in no position of power. I simply came along side the people I met and we looked out at the world together. I listened to story after story, sometimes waiting through much silence. I occasionally went with someone to a case conference, joined in group sessions of various kinds and helped with discharge plans. My primary role was simply to support recovery. I celebrated strengths and hope, and did my best to explore difficult spiritual concerns that arose in the course of illness and healing. People sometimes felt as if they had committed the "unpardonable sin," or came to believe that they were "beyond God's universe;" or that God had granted them divine powers or had given them all knowledge without error or uncertainty. Others would say nothing for days, talk incoherently, describe hearing voices, or seeing something visible only to themselves. Others were profoundly terrified or anxious.

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What people reported about their feelings and mood, what thoughts they shared, the way they behaved, their history was for the doctors and nurse and therapists and social workers, helpful in seeing perhaps a pattern of illness. At its best a diagnosis guides treatment - the building of healing relationships, the use of medication to reduce symptoms or help reset brain function, provisions for a supportive and patient recovery. But the notion of mental illness, so laden with ignorance and stereotypes is itself a burden as can be a particular diagnosis, especially when we lose sight of the individual, lumping everyone who has the same diagnosis into one generalized category.

Mental illness does not define a person. Nor does a diagnosis tell you who I am. People ask me if I think they are crazy. I always say no, I think you may be having an extraordinary experience. All of us have extraordinary experiences in our lives. We dream, we imagine and see beyond immediate realities. We feel deeply and our hearts can leap greatly.

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We all struggle at times, and we each have unique and personal strengths. Our greatest calling is to draw the circle of beloved community so widely as possible that no one is excluded. Stigma are the signs we use to mark someone as "different," an excuse we use to pass by or let a suffering continue. The answer to stigma is not simply education, but the building of human community rooted in honoring all as our neighbor. Stigma ends with each person we companion and each moment we choose to enter together into the journey of healing and recovery with each other.

Illinois Regional Consulting

Pathways to Promise has played a crucial role in shaping regional consulting efforts in Illinois. Beginning in 2009 with the first-ever "National Faith-Based Summit on Mental Health" held in Belleville, through 2014 with the "Creating Hope: The Power of Faith Communities in Mental Health Recovery" held in Chicago, Pathways has laid the interfaith ground work for Regional Consultants to provide technical assistance for faith communities regarding mental health.

Following the 2009 National Summit, a core group of organizations in and near Chicago started seeking other local groups who shared their vision of assisting faith communities as they support individuals and families struggling with mental health challenges. In 2009, what is now known as the [Interfaith Mental Health Coalition](#) (IMHC) was officially launched. The IMHC has had two major conferences since inception and numerous mental health trainings ranging from [Mental Health First Aid](#) to [Using Person First Language](#). They have made substantial progress developing local geographic clusters, utilizing communications such as an e-newsletter and facebook, to accomplish the goals of organizing faith communities to use the [Pathways National Training Initiative Model](#). Most recently, Pathways Regional Consultant Rita Rippentrop represented the IMHC on a statewide conference call for Recovery Partners that is coordinated by the Illinois Division of Mental Health, [Recovery Services Development Group](#).

Following the 2014 Creating Hope Conference, a similar small group gathered near East St. Louis to discuss what kind of community they wanted to live in. Some answers included a society where persons with mental illnesses could easily access housing and employment, mental health trainings for as many faith communities as possible, and a reduction in stigma and the desperation that accompanies it. Representation included Recovery Leaders, Family Members, Clergy Members and State Employees. This young group recently met for the third time, drawing upon the expertise of Isaac McCullough from the St. Louis, Missouri coalition to guide them as they move forward.

Both coalitions are working together to promote the [Certified Recovery Support Specialist \(CRSS\) Faith Community Training](#) in Springfield on June 18-19, 2015. The CRSS credential is a competency-based credential that can be earned by persons living with mental health conditions who desire to provide recovery support (aka peer support). Every state has a peer certification, but Pathways is forging ahead in Illinois to provide a training for faith communities who desire to incorporate a CRSS professional into existing ministry teams. Funded by the Illinois Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, this training will be a mutual learning session for individuals pursuing/maintaining their CRSS credential and for faith leaders desiring cultural competency and demonstrating cultural humility.

Congratulations Robert Skrocki

Congratulations to Robert Skrocki for being a recipient of the 2015 National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Social Work Awards! Hailing from the Three Rivers District, Robert was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award for exemplifying professional and personal work which reflects the basic tenets of the social work profession. As one member of the [Interfaith Mental Health Coalition](#) recently expressed to Robert in a group email communication "You really do get it!" Robert accepted his award on Monday, March 16, 2015 in Carol Stream, Illinois. You can read more about Robert, Board Chair of Pathways to Promise, by visiting both the [NASW](#) website and [Pathways to Promise website](#).



Mental Health Basics For Life & Ministry

Last fall, [Pathways to Promise](#) collaborated with the National Alliance on Mental Illness ([NAMI FaithNet](#)) and the [American Association of Pastoral Counselors](#) to conduct a seminar entitled “Mental Health Basics for Life & Ministry: What Every Pastor Needs to Know.” Held at [Christian Theological Seminary](#), this workshop equipped participants with some basic mental health education such as Understanding Trauma & Trauma Informed Care, [The Way of Companionship](#) and [Wellness Recovery Action Plan](#)® for Faith Leaders. If you would like to customize a presentation for your special event, please email info@pathways2promise.org

Contextualizing Spirituality, Faith Communities & Religious Practices - Part I

AJ French, CRSS

Individual spirituality, faith communities and religious practices can help or hinder a person’s recovery from mental illnesses and traumatic experiences. Traditionally, mental health systems and systems partners have discouraged discussion about individual spirituality, faith communities and religious practices to the detriment of individuals who benefit from engaging in spiritual, faith and religious expression. Mental health culture is just beginning to recognize the tremendous contribution these unique resources can have in one’s wellness and resilience. Understanding that different words mean different things to different people, let us have a clear definition of each of these words—spirituality, faith and religion—in the context of mental health recovery.

Spirituality, within both mental health and addiction recovery systems, is extremely personal and distinctly different than a faith community or religious system. Spirituality is about what matters most to an individual. What will so powerfully motivate you to do something you would not otherwise do because it is intertwined with your identity? Family relationships, work experiences and artistic passions are all examples of spirituality because spirituality is defined as what brings meaning and purpose to one’s life. It is critically important that mental health communities provide opportunity for spiritual inclusion of all persons - - with or without identifying a divine higher power because spirituality, like recovery, is a self-directed journey.

Faith communities operate as [natural supports](#) for individuals who share a common belief and understanding about Divine Power. When I was employed as a Recovery Support Specialist (aka peer specialist) at a community hospital which had a psychiatric unit, I consistently observed pain experienced from persons who

“It is critically important that mental health communities provide opportunity for spiritual inclusion of all persons”

were failed by their faith communities. These are persons who desired to draw close to a faith family. Occasionally, someone would share with me how shamed they felt when someone attempted to cast out a demon. More frequently, however, I would witness individuals who were profoundly hurt when not visited by clergy members; knowing full well that that clergy would visit them had they been hospitalized on any unit other than the psychiatric unit. Thankfully this is not everyone’s experience and there is a noticeable positive shift in attitudes.

[The Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities](#) just published [Recovering Liberty](#), their monthly newsletter and it is filled with resources from and for faith communities. In particular, their research on [Developing Welcoming Faith Communities](#) noted Pathways to Promise and the Companionship Model, as well as many of our member efforts. While this is a rather lengthy paragraph, I would be remiss to not point out that many individuals with psychiatric conditions have lost ties with their family, making the faith family a primary source of love and connection.

Note: Contextualizing Spirituality, Faith & Religion Part II will be published in our next quarterly edition.

Our Pivotal Moment In Time

AJ French, CRSS

March 7, 2015 a crowd gathered near the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama as [President Obama honored Civil Rights Activists](#) for their relentless efforts over fifty years ago. He attributed the success of this movement, in part, to the enormous faith of the men and women who marched saying "...not one religious tradition, but of many, coming together to shape their country's course." As I reflect on the responsibilities that faith communities have to promote social justice issues, I can't help but wonder when will our time come. When will faith communities seek to support the Recovery Movement (aka consumer/survivor movement) in a manner that is consistent with the tenants of their faith?

April 5, 1977 a crowd outside the San Francisco Federal Building began shouting "Now! Not May! Now!" in response to Secretary Joseph Califano's promise to sign into law regulations implementing [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) later in May. The crowd — and persons with disabilities throughout the entire nation — could wait no longer for justice and literally camped inside the building, in an unprecedented act of social conviction. To the depths of my soul, I feel the urgency in their cries because it is also our cry for justice. Persons with mental health conditions have been suffered into dependency resulting in legalized discrimination and open ridicule in everyday conversations throughout our nation.

March 12, 1990 another crowd of individuals began climbing the Capitol steps chanting "[ADA Now!](#)" as they fought for passage of the landmark American's with Disabilities Act (ADA). When [President George H. W. Bush signed the ADA into law](#), he attributed this historic act to the work of a passionate coalition that had labored for decades. As I write this, I am filled with hope because I see the emergence of such another coalition. There are many pioneers who have come before us. They labored and they toiled upon, what my faith tradition would characterize as, "hard soil." Yet I see new life and I am encouraged.

May 3, 2015 more crowds will gather throughout the nation to celebrate [Mental Health & Dignity Day](#). Driven by Recovery Leadership, this day is set aside as a national gathering in local municipalities to raise awareness, promote dignity and advocate for the civil rights of persons living with mental health conditions. National Mental Health & Dignity Day is the beginning of a greater movement that, I believe, will lead us to our first pivotal moment in time. Every movement has it's moments and we are on the brink of ours.

Changes Moving Forward

Pathways to Promise has experienced quite a few positive changes since our last newsletter. You may have noticed on the front of our newsletter that Pathways theme is "Putting Faith in Mental Health Recovery." The next newsletter edition will include an article exploring what that means. Pathways also now has a P.O. Box instead of a street address. This is because we have transitioned to a virtual office. In this day and age of technology, staff members are able to work from home offices to accomplish the mission of organization.

Speaking of staff, Pathways welcomes Dawn Pennington as the newest member of Pathways Staff! Dawn is assisting Pathways Board Member Cindy Holtrop with adding website content and revising Pathways literature. Vicki Eichhorn will continue to handle orders and bookkeeping.

If you haven't already done so, please check out our new website at www.pathways2promise.org and keep coming back for new blog entries that will periodically be posted. If you would like opportunity to submit a blog entry or newsletter article, please email info@pathways.org to request submission guidelines.