



May 1, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For the last seventy-five years, our nation has recognized Mental Health Awareness Month throughout the month of May. It serves as an important response to the millions of Americans living with mental health conditions. The last several years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have experienced an increase in anxiety, depression, and other mental health illnesses. We can affirm that there is work yet to be done to assist those who are struggling as well as “to fully overcome the stigma with which mental illness has often been branded and, in general, to ensure that the culture of community prevails over the mentality of rejection, according to which greater care and attention is given to those who bring productive advantages to society, forgetting that those who suffer allow the irrepressible beauty of human dignity to shine forth in their wounded lives,” as Pope Francis has reminded us (Pontifical Message, June 14, 2021).

With the many voices throughout the United States, I hope to raise awareness of the widespread concern about mental health and advocate for additional resources to be directed toward those in need, especially our young people, particularly throughout Central Pennsylvania. Through prayer, advocacy, and action, we can begin to make a difference in the lives of the many who suffer in ways often hidden from the view of others, listening without judgment, and responding with compassion.

Our Diocese has worked many years to advocate and respond to those in need of care. Last year, Catholic Charities served over 480 clients with outpatient counseling services. Later this month, on Wednesday, May 8, we will be taking our mental health services to the streets by opening a walk-in mental health clinic in the City of Harrisburg. This clinic will provide an accessible and compassionate space for those who need a listening ear. The clinic adds to the many ways in which the Church in Harrisburg responds to the Gospel call of mercy and service, bringing us closer to those most in need.

“Sadness, apathy and spiritual tiredness end up dominating the lives of people, who are overloaded due to the rhythm of life today,” as Pope Francis has noted. Like the Lord, who draws close to the brokenhearted, our new clinic responds to the Holy Father’s invitation: “Let us try to be close to those who are exhausted, to those who are desperate, without hope. ... Let us not forget that, along with the indispensable psychological counseling, which is useful and effective, Jesus’ words also help.”

Throughout this month of May, let us entrust those who suffer and the professionals who undertake this work of relief to the Blessed Mother, Health of the Sick and Comfort of the Afflicted. May she, who stood by the Cross of the Lord, help us to stand with those who need healing, consolation, and peace.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg