



“A Healing Presence: The Church’s Call to Mental Health Ministry”

On October 9–10, marking World Mental Health Day and Pope Leo XIV’s monthly prayer intention, bishops, academic experts and pastoral workers from around the world gather in Rome. Press conference Saturday, October 10, at 2:30 p.m. in the Sala Marconi, Palazzo Pio.

ROME, 6 October 2026 — **More than a billion people worldwide are living with mental health conditions**, according to the World Health Organization. Only a small fraction of them turn to hospitals or mental health professionals; most find their support in the community. And a growing number are knocking on the doors of dioceses and parishes, looking for a helping hand. What is the Church already doing? And what more can it do to answer **Pope Leo’s call** in his prayer intention for October 2026, when he invites the faithful to pray “**that the mental health ministry be established throughout the Church**, helping to overcome the stigma and discrimination of persons with mental illnesses”?

These questions will be the focus of a gathering in Rome on **Friday and Saturday, October 9–10** (World Mental Health Day), titled “**A Healing Presence: The Church’s Call to Mental Health Ministry.**” The event is organized by the **International Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers** in collaboration with the **Don Luigi Di Liegro International Foundation** and the **Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network**, under the patronage of the **Pontifical Academy for Life**. Two days of reflection, prayer and the sharing of new pastoral tools will help the Church respond to a growing challenge in today’s society. Participants include bishops, pastoral workers, academic experts and people with lived experience of mental illness.

The gathering opens Friday, October 9, at 3 p.m. at the Complesso del Gesù (Via degli Astalli, 17) with a panel discussion inspired by the Holy Father’s prayer intention. The first part addresses “Stigma, Welcome, and Safe Spaces”; the second, “Caregivers, Bridges, and Integration.” Mass follows in the Church of the Gesù.

Saturday morning, October 10, is devoted to a site visit to learn firsthand about the projects of the Di Liegro Foundation, reflect on the state of mental illness among young people in Italy, and hear caregivers and patients speak about their own experiences.

At 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 10, a press conference will be held in the Sala Marconi, Palazzo Pio (Piazza Pia 3), titled “Carrying Out the Pope’s Vision for Mental Health Ministry.” Alongside the event organizers, several bishops will take part, in person (Archbishop Borys Gudziak, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia and president of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv) or by video link (Bishop John Dolan of Phoenix, USA; Bishop Victor Phalana of Klerksdorp, South Africa; Archbishop Thomas J. Netto of Trivandrum, India; Bishop Tesfasellassie Medhin of Adigrat, Ethiopia; and Bishop Wismick Jean-Charles of Port-au-Prince, Haiti). The press conference will also present two new video courses,

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Basic Mental Health Literacy and **Psychological First Aid**, just produced by the International Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers. The association will make them available free of charge to dioceses, parishes, and any media company or broadcaster interested in airing them.

The gathering will close later that afternoon with the Rosary at the Lourdes Grotto in the Vatican Gardens.

Deacon Ed Shoener, president of the International Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, remarks: “Mental health has become a central issue in society today. And for us as Catholics, accompanying people who live with mental illness has become an increasingly necessary service in our faith communities. This gathering in Rome and at the Vatican, coinciding with Pope Leo’s prayer intention and World Mental Health Day, aims to foster a shared reflection, offer a glimpse of what dioceses on several continents are already doing, and make tools available to everyone so we can answer the Holy Father’s call to establish mental health ministry throughout the Church.”

Luigina Di Liegro, secretary general of the Don Luigi Di Liegro International Foundation, adds: “The title of this event, ‘A Healing Presence’, describes a responsibility we feel deeply every day in our work. It means standing beside people living with psychological fragility, and beside their families, with attentive listening, competence and humanity, so that no one feels alone. As Don Luigi Di Liegro used to say: ‘I don’t ask where you come from, but where we want to go together.’”

Video material will be made available to journalists and media professionals on request during the press conference on Saturday, October 10.

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The event program is attached.

ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE: Journalists and media operators who wish to attend the press conference on 10 October, at Sala Marconi, must apply, no less than 24 hours before the event, through the Holy See Press Office online Accreditation System available at:

press.vatican.va/accreditamenti

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