

SPIRITUALITY/FAITH-RELATED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUPS



July 2013

INTRODUCTION:

In response to questions about how to start and conduct a faith-related mental health support group, 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 that community. The “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. Most 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 local NAMI Affiliate, but the groups are not necessarily sponsored by their NAMI 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. Facilitators’ contact information is current as of May 2013.

This document is downloadable from the NAMI Faith Net web page at www.nami.org/faithnet. For more information, contact namifaithnet@nami.org or call the NAMI Help Line at (800) 950-6264.

CONTENTS:

CROSS Ministries (<i>Christians Reaching Out in Support & Sharing</i>) – Lexington, Ky.	p. 2
FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP Support Group – Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago	p. 3
HOPE’S NEST - Trinity United Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, Calif.	p. 4
MENTAL HEALTH FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP – St. George Episcopal Church, San Antonio	p.5
MISS Support Group (Mental Illness Spiritual Support Group) – Toledo, Ohio	p. 6
SPIRITUALITY Support Group–Adult and Child Behavioral Health, Indianapolis, Ind.	p. 7

CROSS MINISTRIES*(Christians Reaching Out in Support & Sharing)*
A Faith –Related Mental Health Support Group

Name of Group: CROSS MINISTRIES (*Christians Reaching Out in Support & Sharing*)

Sponsoring Organization: Space was made available by a United Methodist Church in Lexington, Ky.; facilitator was a former President of NAMI Lexington, Angie O'Maley, MSW, MFT.

Purpose: To share our story and struggles, to give and receive comfort and encouragement, and to receive God's perspective & peace. Disclaimer: this is not a therapy group or intended to replace professional or in-depth counseling.

Invitees: The support group members were persons who had a diagnosis of a mental illness or were family members.

Frequency and Length of Meeting: First, third and fifth Monday evenings, including holidays, since these often are the people who have little or no family support. Maximum length 90 minutes. Important: start and end on time. Facilitator must help group stay within set time limits, so that people will continue coming. When they know they won't be kept too long or too late by uncontrolled discussion and sharing, they'll trust the leader enough to commit to an evening regularly.

Description of Meeting: Group of about 15 met in the lounge of the church, using chairs and a sofa in a circle. No refreshments were served except on special occasions. This made it simpler to run and more to the point. Facilitator welcomed people as they arrived and had them use name tags (first names) because new people would arrive occasionally. Name tags made them feel part of the group sooner.

Welcome & opening prayer by facilitator

Devotional (5 min.) offered by one of the group. This responsibility was passed around to various attendees. They could read a favorite scripture verse and tell what it meant to them, a poem, or a short inspirational excerpt.

Summarize Goals: (Facilitator reads purpose described above)

Sharing Time: (Facilitator explains:)Each person shares briefly their name and what's gone on since group met last, (4-5 min. each, depending on number present - triumphs, challenges, needs and concerns). Newcomers give name and either share briefly or pass. After everyone has shared, special attention may briefly be given to one or two in most need of encouragement or support.

Closing Prayer Time: Sharing of thanksgiving and requests. All may take notes if they wish, but one person prays for all the concerns mentioned. This person is asked in advance if they are willing to lead in prayer. No one is put on the spot.

Comments: Brochures describing the group are distributed through the community, the churches and NAMI Affiliate.

FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP SUPPORT GROUP
A Faith –Related Mental Health Support Group

Name of Group: 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 with 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 with mental illness are often socially isolated and even feel isolated from God. Faith and Fellowship is a ministry where persons with a mental illness can experience the love of Gods and their sisters and brothers

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

Frequency & Place: They meet semi-weekly 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

Contact Connie Rakitan at (708) 383-9276

MENTAL ILLNESS AND FAITH COMMUNITY OUTREACH:
COMMUNITIES OF COMPASSION AND JUSTICE

HOPE'S NEST
A Faith –Related Mental Health Support Groups

Name Of Group: 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: It is a support group for those living with a mental illness. Four members from the church also attend. Although it is given from a Christian perspective, all religions are respected and those of all faiths are welcome.

Frequency & Place: It meets the first Sunday of each month at 12:30– 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. Then ask each person to give their name and briefly state how well they are dealing with their mental health issues on this day. During the next twenty minutes we discuss a topic from the Bible, led by one of the attendees who has volunteered to do so. One example of our discussion is one of the attributes found in "The Fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23) and its application in their lives.

After a ten 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 they 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.*"

Susan and Gunnar Christiansen, NAMI California

www.trinityconnection.com

MENTAL HEALTH FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

A Faith –Related Mental Health Support Group

Name Of Group: Mental Health Family Support group

Sponsoring Organization: St. George Episcopal Church, San Antonio

Purpose: Our purpose is to offer a safe place to gather for people dealing with mental illness, a prayerful environment and a place for sharing each other's feelings, problems, needs, etc.

Invitees: Over-comers/copers (people living with mental illness); family, friends, people of all faiths; Average in 2012 was 10 people, only two from my church.

Frequency & Place: St. George Episcopal Church; every second Wednesday of the month;

7–8:30 p.m.; Conference room in office building

Description of Meeting: Beverages and cookies furnished by the facilitator. Normally no speaker. But first three months of 2013 we did; we may continue in the future.

Fellowship, gathering time & Introductions 10-15 minutes

Serving and Eating Food During the meeting at-will

Educational Component 10-20 minutes

Devotions/Readings 5-10 minutes

Prayer and Sharing 45 minutes to 1 hour. We pray before we start and at the end for each person sharing that night.

Closing 5-10 minutes

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

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

Contact: Jerry Fulenwider (210)492-4978; Email - fulenwiderj@gmail.com

MISS (MENTAL ILLNESS SPIRITUAL SUPPORT GROUP)
A Faith –Related Mental Health Support Groups

Name of Group: Mental Illness Spiritual Support Group (MISS)

Sponsoring Organization: NAMI Toledo, Ohio

Purpose: Based on National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) principles, these groups focus on truth about mental illness with a sprinkling of prayer and scripture encouragement. Aim is to have a more positive, joyful life despite challenges of a misunderstood disease.

Invitees: Both individuals who live with mental illness and loved ones; three to six people usually attend

Frequency & Place: Weekly, Thurs. evenings, 7-8:30 p.m.; church conference room; No funding necessary—accommodations provided by church.

Description of Meeting: No food provided but members can bring snack for self if desired.

Fellowship, gathering time

Introductions and reading of NAMI Support Group guidelines. (The group added their own supporting scripture verses)

Educational Component

Devotions/Readings

Prayer and Sharing

Closing

Resources: NAMI E-news, FaithNet articles, National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities Mental Illness Networks; *Guidebook for Overcomers Outreach 12-Step Support Groups* by Bob and Pauline Bartosch adapted to emotional problems; *Serenity, A Companion for Twelve Step Recovery Complete with New Testament Psalms and Proverbs*; *Today in the Word Daily Devotional* by Moody Bible Institute, Chicago; Joyce Meyer's *Enjoying Everyday Life* articles

Publicity: I do networking for publicity by posting notices at libraries, churches, giving info to service agencies, serving on Mental Health Council for Toledo Area Ministries emphasizing spiritual support groups, work with Toledo Catholic Diocesan office for equal access ministries mental illness network to plan mental health retreat for all faiths, give info re: email group and blog to church groups and other outreach ministries, volunteer at Pastoral Care office of local hospital and give info re mental illness spiritual support group.

Contact: Judy Beckman (419) 377-9898 JudithBeckman@peoplepc.com
www.divinecare.gather.com

SPIRITUALITY SUPPORT GROUP

A Faith –Related Mental Health Support Group

Name of Group: Spirituality Support Group

Sponsoring Organization: Adult and Child Behavioral Care (A Community Mental Health Center)

Purpose: Individuals who live with mental illness having a forum to discuss/dialogue the spiritual piece of their recovery journey. Several individuals voice the value of having this forum to speak frankly/openly about their spirituality. This part of recovery has been neglected/minimized for some who are diagnosed with severe/persistent mental health issues.

Invitees: Clients of the Center, Individuals who live with mental illness

Frequency & Place: Weekly, Tuesdays, 2-3 p.m. We meet year-round, except on holidays, in one of the activity rooms at the Center.

Description of Meeting: No food is served. We gather in a circle of chairs. On occasion we have an educational component or speaker; but the individuals themselves take a lead by introducing information/experiences. About 8-12 people attend.

Fellowship, gathering time & Introductions: 5 minutes

Serving and Eating Food: N/A

Educational Component: 45 minutes

Devotions/Readings: 5 minutes

Prayer and Sharing: 45 minutes of sharing-the sharing is mostly the individuals relating information/experiences

Closing: n/a

Comments: Resources, workbooks or curricula:

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 individuals - books, music, etc. they find helpful.

We publicize the group through internal communications for consumers only enrolled in our mental health center. All clients are welcome, from any faith or non-faith background.