



# NAMI

National Alliance on Mental Illness

## Why Should African American Churches Care about Mental Illness?

*By Elder Bobby Gibson SR., M.A., L.P.C., The Potters House\**

The African American church should care about mental illnesses because these diseases affect many of our members and their families. Without proper treatment, the lives of our brothers and sisters are disturbed and hindered. The results have a direct effect upon the church and its ability to carry out its mission.

We should also care about mental illness because we, as community faith leaders, have a lot of influence in the communities we serve. Pastors and other faith leaders can bridge the gap between the mental health profession and the church. In our community, there is a lot of mistrust toward mental health institutions and professionals. This, as well as the stigma attached to people who have mental illnesses, prevents our community members from seeking treatment. Our congregations look to the church leaders to lead them in the right direction. We, the church leaders, must be ready to assist vulnerable families.

African American congregations need to learn about mental illness and treatment. Often, congregations have more opportunities to observe a person that might be experiencing mental illness. This could help us intervene and find appropriate treatment. Early intervention could save unnecessary anguish and suffering. If the congregations and their leadership take an active role in this problem, it will reduce the discrimination of thinking people are crazy who have mental issues. It will also bring hope that people lives can be better, even with the disease.

More African American congregations are implementing lay counseling programs and support groups to serve this population. Here at The Potter's House, we have a full-time Christian Counseling Center that offers both individual, family, and group counseling. Both licensed professionals and paraprofessionals offer these services. We have trained approximately 90 lay counselors to assist the counseling center with spiritual enrichment groups in the last three years. Unlike traditional counseling, we combine spiritual truths with a clinical approach. We also have a substance abuse treatment program that offers both inpatient and outpatient care.

We are doing a lot, but there is a lot more to do. I applaud NAMI's efforts to educate faith leaders and their congregations. I encourage every congregation to start this wonderful journey.

*\*"The Potter longs to put you back together again." -Jeremiah 18:3,4*

*The Potter's House is a nondenominational church, located in Dallas, Texas. It has more than 28,000 members who step out in force, inspired and spiritually armed by Bishop T.D. Jakes to help others in their communities and across the world. Christian Today and The Dallas Morning News tag The Potter's House church as one of the fastest growing churches in the nation.*

***You are not alone. There is Help. Call NAMI Today!***

**Call NAMI's free HelpLine number for information and referrals**

**1-800-950-NAMI (6264)**

**[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)**