
The Loving Care on Every Side

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Reverend Bill Harkins**

Donny called me over to see his paintings in the gallery at Holy Comforter, and as I admired his art, he said to me, *"I know many don't understand what it's like to live with schizophrenia. Some people are even afraid of me. But here, especially when I am painting, I know that I am a whole person partly because of, and not in spite, of my illness. No one sees the world exactly as I do. Here, I know God loves me too."* In the Book of Common Prayer we give thanks for and celebrate life together in Christ with this lovely prayer:

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care that surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. ... Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know him and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

This prayer is about life in community, and faithfulness in the midst of uncertainty and change. And it is about hope. I am aware that many suffer from significant isolation because of mental illness and the associated stigma.

The Rev. Joani Peacock, priest associate at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia, lives with bipolar disorder. In her blog, "Orthodox and Unhinged," she describes herself as a "mental health evangelist," highlighting the need for mental health awareness in parishes and communities of faith. Episcopalians elsewhere are speaking out, educating, and taking steps to educate others. Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison, an Episcopalian, is the co-director of the Mood Disorders Center at Johns Hopkins University. The author of many books, including "An Unquiet Mind," Jamison writes about the spiritual dimension of mental illness, and shares her personal experience of living with bi-polar disorder.

In Christian communities, health and wholeness are possible when awareness and community support are more important than shame and fear. Here, wholeness is not determined by or limited to "symptom relief." Donald Winnicott, the psychiatrist whose deep Anglican faith informed his practice, said, *"You may cure your patient of her or his symptoms and still not know what makes them go on living. The absence of pathology may be a definition of health, but it does not mean having a life."*

In Atlanta, Holy Comforter parish, whose day center serves people with mental illness and other disabilities, contests stigma by offering loving care at every turn. Today, nearly two-thirds of the parishioners there have some form of mental illness.

At the Cathedral of St. Philip, we serve the community through our Counseling Center where every day, in the sacred space beyond the labyrinth, healing and transformation occur. When we provide counseling in the context of the church, and in conversation with theological core values, we question definitions of normality which can constrain and limit deeper understandings of what it means to be a whole person. Pastoral counselors are in a unique position to critically expand frameworks of mental illness and recovery.

This year many of us will run the Peachtree Road Race in support of the Care and Counseling Center of Georgia. Our own

Cathedral Counseling Center is a CCGG partner location. ([Click here to contribute.](#))

I invite you to hold those who serve there, and those who benefit from their services, in your prayers. Please do look for opportunities to insure that Donny, my friend at Holy Comforter, and others in need, experience hope amid the loving care which surrounds them on every side.

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