

Caring for and Serving Life: The Heart of Hospitality

By Sr Idília Maria Moreira G. Carneiro

On the occasion of World Mental Health Day

On 10 October, we celebrate World Mental Health Day. This year, the theme of the World Health Organization is “Lived and Heard Experiences: Real Voices, Real Change”.

This theme reminds us of the central place of the person, as the subject of care and the protagonist of their own therapeutic journey. The person comes first, not the illness; abilities, not disabilities; the meaning of life and the defence of dignity, especially when life is most threatened and vulnerable.

Placing the person at the centre, listening to their feelings and welcoming their experience is a fundamental principle of the Gospel that Jesus teaches us. Through the way Jesus approaches, touches and heals people, Jesus brings healing to the body and inner life, enabling people to embrace a new vision for their lives and renewed integration into family and society.

The charism of Hospitality, which defines us as the Hospitaller Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, commits us to embodying the compassion of Jesus and continuing the healing mission of Jesus in the world, especially among people experiencing psychological suffering, mental illness and mental disorders. At the heart of our mission, and as its very reason for being, is care for the person who suffers, welcomed and cared for in every dimension of life. In each person, we recognise the living face of Jesus: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Welcoming, listening, caring, embracing, understanding and accompanying are just some of the verbs that shape our Hospitaller Model, guiding and characterising our work in the field of mental health. Across the 25 countries where we carry out our mission, in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe, we recognise that mental health is an area of great importance, yet one that is often undervalued in political decisions and the allocation of resources. In many circumstances, economic considerations prevail over the value of life and human dignity.

Mental health is neither a peripheral issue nor a strictly technical matter. It is a central concern and an essential indicator of the health of our society, its humanity, ethical responsibility and compassion. It reveals a vulnerability, perhaps greater than at other moments in our history, that profoundly affects people's sense of existence, hope and vision for their lives.

The psychological suffering experienced by so many people, together with new and complex mental disorders, reflects a profound wound of our time. This reality challenges the very heart of the Church, calling it to care for life, to take responsibility for those who have fallen and to offer them shelter in a home that welcomes, cares, accompanies and affirms their dignity. For human life is sacred and full of meaning.

Hospitality commits us to combating stigma and supporting processes of inclusion and the rightful rights of people living with mental illness. All too often, people experiencing mental disorders face a double exclusion: that caused by the illness itself, which makes the person more vulnerable, and that arising from social rejection, loneliness and marginalisation.

Celebrating World Mental Health Day is both an encouragement and a commitment to building healthier and more healing societies, sensitive and attentive to the most vulnerable; societies that place people first, respect their dignity, foster inclusion for all and bring scientific research and advances into dialogue with a culture of care for life. May institutions, political leaders, communities and society as a whole become builders of a more humane society!

We feel a profound connection, rooted in our charism, with the prayer intention of Pope Leo XIV for this month of October, inviting us to pray “for pastoral care in mental health”, so that the Church may increasingly become an open home, capable of welcoming and accompanying those experiencing psychological suffering.

I express my gratitude to the entire Hospitaller Community which, in the different realities of the world, embodies the charism of Hospitality, making visible the face and presence of the Samaritan Church alongside those who suffer.

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