

Supporting Mental Health in Religious Life

A Message of Hope, Compassionate Leadership, and Courageous Help-Seeking

Religious life is a sacred vocation rooted in service, prayer, compassion, and love for humanity. Every day, religious sisters, brothers, priests, and pastoral leaders walk closely with people who carry pain, grief, poverty, trauma, illness, conflict, and uncertainty. In the midst of this generous service, many religious also quietly carry emotional burdens that often remain unseen.



Today, the Church is increasingly recognizing the importance of mental and emotional wellbeing within religious life. This is not a sign of weakness, but a recognition of our shared humanity. A person can be deeply faithful, prayerful, and committed to God, while also needing rest, accompaniment, counselling, encouragement, or emotional support.

Religious leaders and superiors have a unique and beautiful role in this journey. Through compassionate leadership, attentive listening, understanding, and encouragement, they can create communities where members feel safe, valued, supported, and hopeful. Leadership that accompanies with kindness and wisdom becomes a source of healing and strength for the entire community.

Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded the Church of the importance of tenderness and accompaniment. He once said, *"The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel."* This invitation also applies to how religious communities care for the emotional wellbeing of their members.

Pope Leo XIV also emphasized the importance of human dignity and compassionate presence when he encouraged leaders to "walk closely with people, especially those who are tired, wounded, or discouraged, so that no one feels abandoned on the journey of life." Such words are a reminder that accompaniment and emotional support are deeply rooted in the mission of the Church.

The Holy Scriptures equally remind us that God desires healing, compassion, and mutual support among His people. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). This invitation speaks powerfully to those who may feel emotionally exhausted or overwhelmed.

Saint Paul also encourages communities to care for one another with compassion and solidarity: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). Religious communities become stronger and more life-giving when members journey together with empathy, understanding, and support.

Seeking help should therefore never be viewed as failure or lack of faith. Rather, it is a courageous step toward healing, growth, self-awareness, and healthier service. Counselling, accompaniment, spiritual direction, rest, and supportive conversations can help individuals regain peace, clarity, strength, and renewed purpose in their vocation.

Many religious leaders today are already making meaningful efforts to support the wellbeing of their members by encouraging dialogue, organizing workshops, supporting counselling services, promoting healthy community life, and fostering environments where people can speak openly without fear or shame. These efforts deserve appreciation and encouragement because they help create healthier communities and more sustainable ministries.

There is hope. No struggle is too hidden for healing, and no burden is too heavy to be shared. With compassionate leadership, supportive communities, faith, and professional accompaniment where needed, religious men and women can continue serving with renewed joy, balance, and inner freedom.

To every religious superior and leader: your kindness, attentiveness, and encouragement can become a powerful source of hope and healing for those entrusted to your care.

To every religious member who may be silently struggling: you are valued, loved, and not alone. Seeking support is an act of wisdom, courage, and hope.

And to every religious community: may we continue building environments where people feel free to pray, heal, grow, serve, and journey together with compassion, dignity, and hope.

By Sr. Eddie Kajuna on World Schizophrenia Awareness Day 24th 2026