

The Marist Way of Connecting Faith with Mental Health – Part 2

"Every Psychological Problem, at Bottom, is a Spiritual Problem."

Carl Jung

This excursion into the Catholic understanding of the virtue of hope leads me to ask if there is any evidence that religious beliefs and practices can be the on-ramp to where life has meaning, purpose, and hope. Dr. Rob Whitley, Ph.D., wrote an article, "Religion and Mental Health: What is the link?"¹ exploring this question. Let me quote a few of his observations.

"The [amassed research](#) indicates that *higher levels of religious belief and practice (known in social science as "religiosity") are associated with better mental health*. In particular, the research suggests that *higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower rates of depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, and suicidal behavior*. Religiosity is also associated with better physical health and subjective well-being."

"Likewise, research indicates that *religiosity can enhance recovery from mental illness, aiding in the healing process*. For example, one classic research study shows that recovery from severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia is better in countries" with [higher levels of religiosity](#).

"For example, *regular attendance at a place of worship embeds an individual into a community of people who can offer material, moral, emotional, and social support, all of which can foster good mental health*. Similarly, many people with mental illness report that private prayer, devotional readings, and religious programming (on TV, the radio, or the internet) can provide solace and comfort, [which can enhance the recovery process](#)."

Marist School is a Catholic Christian school. It is reasonable to ask why our students are struggling with mental and emotional health issues. Just as our students are not immune to getting physically sick, they are not immune to being impacted by the same influences that negatively impact one's mental and emotional health, such as those listed by Daniel Payne and others. Isn't it true that we all sin, though we know better?

In the following reflections, I want to explore how our Catholic Christian faith, if understood and practiced well, is a tremendous resource for promoting mental and emotional health or aiding in healing under mental and emotional duress. In the spirit of Mary, I want to unite our Catholic Christian practices and beliefs with the excellent work our mental and emotional health care professionals do in our Counseling Department and that of our parents. That is in keeping with the mission of Marist School, which is to form the *whole person* in the image of Christ through instruction grounded in religious values, the teachings of the Catholic Church, and the spirit of the Society of Mary.

In responding to the mental health crisis, we need a holistic approach. Carl Jung, the 20th-century analytical psychologist, concluded that every psychological problem, at bottom, is a spiritual problem.² That is not to say that mental and emotional health care providers are not necessary. They have a crucial and essential role in the healing process.

¹ Whitley, Ph.D., Rob, *Religion and Mental Health: What is the Link?*, Psychology Today, December 18, 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-men/201712/religion-and-mental-health-what-is-the-link>.

² Barron, Robert Bishop, "Understanding the Mental Health Crisis," Podcast, 13:25

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It is to say that there is also a spiritual dimension to promoting mental and emotional health. A Marist Catholic school will be intentional in identifying the specific ways that faith can help young people respond when struggling with their mental and emotional well-being. The spiritual component can complement and support the critical work that school counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and parents render to students who struggle in this way.

It may not require that we do anything new. It may be necessary to explain better how our religious beliefs and practices can promote sound mental and emotional health and provide consolation, support, and hope to those struggling. That is what I am attempting to do with these reflections. From the faith perspective, I am not saying anything we don't already believe or do. What I am saying and doing is being intentional about or shedding a spotlight on how faith and religious practices are necessary to promote the spiritual health of our students which spills over and into other aspects of our lives. Of course, to receive the benefits that faith provides, one must have faith and practice it.

A holistic approach to responding to the mental and emotional health crisis is also in keeping with what Marist School President J.D. Childs has repeatedly reminded us, "We are all in this together."

In the **following reflection**, we will examine the importance of leaning into our faith and claiming its benefits when under duress.