



# Diocese of Davenport

*Office of the Bishop*

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September 2, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every year during the first week of October, the National Alliance on Mental Health and participants across the country join together to raise awareness of mental illness. This year, during the week of October 4-10, our diocese, spearheaded by the Office of Faith Formation, joins in that effort.

You may be asking “Why?”

It is a generally accepted fact that about 1 in 5 teens suffer from a mental disorder that impacts not only their daily activities, but also those of their families, schools, and church communities. Additional teens experience a less serious mental disorder.

When I reflect on these statistics, I think about my 2017 and 2019 National Catholic Youth Conference experiences and the hundreds of our diocesan teens with whom I spent those days. I remember their joy, their energy, their zest for life and faith. If I now look at those experiences through the lens of these statistics, it is sad to fathom that at least 20% of them are suffering in some way, and that deep down under that exterior joy, energy, and life they live a different reality. I ask myself if anyone in their lives – friends, parents, pastors, teachers, significant adults – knows, or even notices. I wonder how many of them have been able to overcome the stigma of admitting that their mental health needs healing, and courageously sought help. I wonder how prepared we adults are to recognize the signs of mental illness and realize the critical role we play in caring for our teens.

During the week of October 4-10, five virtual programs for parents, clergy, ministry leaders, and youth themselves – featuring two respected experts on this topic – will be offered *free of charge*. A variety of resources to help educate and to promote the week are available from the Office of Faith Formation on their website.

The *Mental Illness Awareness Week Project* offers us, the Catholic faith community of the Diocese of Davenport, the opportunity to bring attention to and educate ourselves on the reality of teenage mental health, and to explore the role that our faith plays in healing. I fully support this project, and I urge all our parishes and Catholic schools to take advantage of this opportunity and these resources.

Yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Thomas R. Zinkula  
Bishop of Davenport