



# Day 1 – Removing Stigmas

## **Pray**

St. Dymphna (7<sup>th</sup> Century) is known as a patron of persons suffering from mental and neurological disorders and illnesses, as well as mental health professionals. According to legend, she was an Irish princess who fled from her father, a man who appears to have had a mental illness. She is said to have settled in Geel, Belgium, but was ultimately found and martyred by her father. The people of Geel built a church in her honor, and many made the pilgrimage there seeking to be cured of mental illness. So many pilgrims came that the people of Geel begin to open their homes to them, providing them a place to stay. Persons with mental illness could live and work in their community without any stigma or discrimination. Even today the town of Geel is known as a model for community acceptance of persons who live with a mental illness.



*Good St. Dymphna, great wonder worker in every affliction of mind and body, we humbly implore your powerful intercession with Jesus through Mary, for the health of the sick. St. Dymphna, patroness of persons with mental health conditions, always look out for those men and women, for their healing and recovery, and for an end to stigma and indifference in society. Amen.*

*St. Dymphna, pray for us!*





## ***Learn***

Many people will experience a mental health challenge at some point in their life. The three most common disorder categories are depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and substance use disorders. Yet, despite how common mental illness is, persons living with the symptoms of a mental health condition still face the added burden of stigma. Self-stigma can result in low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and feelings of futility. Moreover, stigma may result in discrimination, such as in housing or employment.

Stigmatization can also occur in important settings within the Church. Many coping with mental illness or facing mental health challenges seek help from the Church, often before mental health professionals, and receive vital social support within parish life. But if they perceive stigmatization in the Church, they may shy away from involvement. Common stereotypes include that persons with poor mental health are dangerous, somehow responsible for their symptoms, unable to care for themselves, and unlikely ever to recover. These stereotypes are false! One of the first ways to eradicate stigmas from Church life is to learn about mental health.

## ***Act***

Before we can collectively move toward removing stigmas from the Church, we must first reflect on our own beliefs about, and behaviors toward, persons living with mental health conditions. Learn more about how broad the term mental illness is, which covers, for example, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and eating disorders. To dispel stereotypes that you may hold, consider taking [The Sanctuary Course for Catholics](#) to learn more about mental health, including mental illness, and how to accompany fellow parishioners in their mental health journey.