

Extending Christ's Care: Catholic Charities Counseling Services

Catholic Charities can be thought of as the social service arm of the Diocese of Winona. Our mission is to serve people in need, especially the poor and marginalized, without regard to race, age, faith tradition, or ability to pay. The Catholic Charities counseling program is one of the avenues through which we live out that mission. Counseling services are offered from one end of the diocese to the other, through offices in Winona, Rochester, Austin, Owatonna, Albert Lea, Mankato, and Worthington.

What kind of situations might lead people to come in for counseling? These are as varied as life itself, but often fall into one of three broad categories:

- People come in for counseling for healing in growth in their marriages and family relationships. Usually people have been trying to improve family life for some time before they try counseling, but are feeling stuck and discouraged. Caring, professional input can help them restore love and care into family life.
- People come into counseling to help them cope with painful life situations. Sometimes dealing with a major loss, like the death of a loved one or an unwanted divorce, can feel overwhelming. People sometimes feel overwhelmed by the demands of their life situation, like managing work and parenting, or caring for aging parents. Many of us are blessed with supportive families and friends to offer support, but sometimes that is not enough. Counseling can provide added help. Sadly, there are others of us who do not have this kind of supportive relationships to help them when going through a hard time. When I was working at a Catholic Charities office in Pennsylvania years ago, a man told me that when I shook his hand in the lobby to welcome him for his session, it was the only touch he experienced all week. It is easy for those of us blessed with caring support networks to forget that others are facing a difficult hardship entirely alone. Counseling sometimes adds needed support while a person builds that support into his or her life through personal relationships and other sources of support, like a faith community.
- People come to counseling for help dealing with distress and life problems caused by mental health concerns. Just as some of us are born with a vulnerability to physical health conditions, like heart problems or diabetes, others are born with a vulnerability to painful mental health concerns like depression or anxiety. In addition, some times people develop these problems through hurts and stresses in life, or because of a traumatic event. Catholic Charities counseling counselors are trained to help people develop skills and practices that can help reduce the hurt and enhance wellness.

Many people who choose to come to Catholic Charities for counseling, both Catholics and non-Catholics, have told us they do so because they know their faith will be respected and valued. For those who want to incorporate their faith into counseling, many of the practices we teach that nourish healing and wellness-the daily practice of gratitude, to cite just one example-can be deepened by adding a prayerful dimension.

Through our counseling program, we strive to extend the love and care of Christ to everyone we serve. Jesus promised us that "Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted." For those who come

to use Catholic Charities counseling services hurting for any reason, our mission, in the name of the Catholic community, is to help fulfill that promise.

John T. McGuire, MSW, LICSW
Clinical Social Worker
Catholic Charities Rochester office