DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Message from Rev. Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A.

Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

on the occasion of World Mental Health Day

10 October 2026

No psychological wound can ever erase the dignity of a human person. This is the first word the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development wishes to say on World Mental Health Day 2026. As Pope Leo XIV recalls in *Dilexi Te*, Christ, "with his love poured out to the end", confirms "the dignity of every human being, especially when 'they are weak, scorned, or suffering'".[1]

Caring for mental health belongs to integral human development, which seeks the good of every person and of the whole person.[2] The Second Vatican Council, in *Gaudium et Spes*, teaches that development must serve the whole person, attending not only to material needs but also to intellectual, moral, spiritual and religious life.[3] A development that forgets the mind and the heart is not integral development.

Pope Leo XIV has named the problem clearly. In Barcelona he told young people that mental health "is increasingly threatened in the context of societies that consider themselves advanced", a sign that "there is something deeply wrong with a certain notion of progress".[4] Throughout the world, even in "advanced" regions, a limited vision of progress has often left people unaware of, and even indifferent to, the mental well-being of others.

Today, interior, emotional and relational wounds represent one of the most profound dimensions of human suffering. Parishes, schools, religious communities and small ecclesial communities are often where people bring their suffering and seek a listening ear, accompaniment and support in times of psychological vulnerability. Thus, in many local Churches, mental health is emerging as one of the most urgent pastoral challenges. Two situations call for particular attention. The first concerns people living through humanitarian crises – war, forced migration, political instability, environmental disasters and structural poverty – which leave deep trauma in individuals and communities. The second concerns young people, who face new forms of emotional vulnerability linked to social pressure, economic uncertainty and isolation. The situations differ, but the root is the same: a person becomes vulnerable when security, relationships, meaning and hope are missing.

---

[1] Leo XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* (4 October 2025), no. 2. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html

[2] Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), no. 14.

[3] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), no. 64.

[4] Leo XIV, Apostolic Journey to Spain, Prayer Vigil at the "Lluís Companys" Olympic Stadium, Barcelona (9 June 2026), no. 2. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/giugno/documents/20260609-spagna-veglia.html

To all who suffer, the Church says: you are not alone, and God has not abandoned you. In Barcelona, after listening to a young woman speak of her depression, the Holy Father recalled Job: when God seems absent, we can entrust our burdens to him, "even crying out to him, even protesting like Job, confident that in some way he is present and near even when he appears to be silent".5 Among the patients of a psychiatric hospital in Malabo, he said simply: "God loves us just as we are. [...] God wants to heal us."6 In the hour of his anguish, Christ took upon himself the anguish of all humanity.7 Faith does not replace care; it accompanies it and gives it hope.

No one heals alone. "We cannot do this alone", the Pope told the young people in Barcelona; We need someone "who can accompany us with discretion without rushing to explain that pain".[8] This echoes the theme of this year's World Mental Health Day: "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change". Healing often begins the moment a person feels truly heard.

Listening must become action. The Church cannot limit herself to occasional or reactive responses. As Christians, we are called to develop a stable, competent, compassionate and preventive ministry that embraces the person in their totality: body, mind and spirit. This requires trained pastoral workers, collaboration with health professionals, clear referral pathways, attention to suicide prevention, support for families and care for young people. The Dicastery also invites all people of good will to engage meaningfully with those who are struggling with their mental health, and to work with the Church and other institutions to shape policies, services and decisions. Those who live with mental suffering are not only recipients of care: they are protagonists of the path forward, and their voices must help shape the answers. Caring for them is not a marginal concern. It belongs to the heart of the Church's mission.

We entrust ourselves to Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*, so that every person may rediscover, even in the hardest trials, the joy of feeling loved, recognised and accompanied in their human and spiritual journey.

Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A.

---

[5] Leo XIV, Prayer Vigil, Barcelona, no. 2.
[6] Leo XIV, Visit to the Staff and Patients of the "Jean Pierre Olie" Psychiatric Hospital, Malabo (21 April 2026). https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/april/documents/20260421-guinea-eq-ospedale.html
[7] Cf. Leo XIV, Prayer Vigil, Barcelona, no. 2.
[8] Ibid.