

DAMI News

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APRIL 20, 2006

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Spring Review

Annual Meeting

DAMI will hold its Annual Meeting from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 18 at the Minnesota Church Center. We will have a short program, election

Activities at DAMI

1. Annual Meeting
2. Mental Health
3. Training

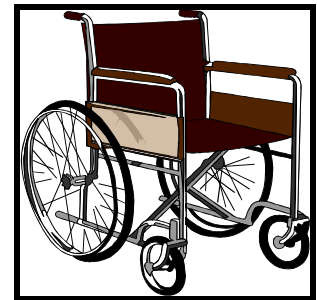
Info: 612-230-3264

of board members, guest speakers and refreshments. The meeting is free and open to

all, especially to those who have supported DAMI this past year.

Mental Health

For the last eight months, DAMI has been consulting with the Basilica of St. Mary, Minneapolis, on developing a mental health ministry. The Basilica will hold a resource fair on May 6-7 when 33 mental health organizations will present their information to the public after each mass. You are invited.



DOES YOUR CONGREGATION HAVE A WHEEL CHAIR ON HAND IN CASE ONE IS NEEDED?

Training

Faith UMC of St. Anthony Park invited DAMI to present training on disability awareness to their Adult Faith Forum on April 2.

DAMI Annual Meeting, May 18

This year, Mary Lindell is our keynote speaker. Mary has a 20+ year career as a Special Ed K-12 teacher and an assistant professor of education at Bethel University.

She is married with a 12 yr. old daughter and a 9 yr. old son who has Down Syndrome

We will also be electing board members at the An-

nual Meeting. We need members who have fund raising, marketing and strategic planning skills. To serve on the DAMI Board, call 612-230-3264.

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Faith Communities and SPMI

SPMI means Severe and Persistent Mental Illness. Included in this category are schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and acute depression. One in every five families lives with mental illness, and sometimes the illness is severe and persistent. When families care for loved ones who live with one of these illnesses, the care gives themselves experience fatigue and exhaustion. But when they turn to their communities of faith for help, they often encounter attitudes that are less than helpful.

What can a faith community do in response to its member families who live with mental illness, especially if it is severe and persistent?

Our society nurtures a strong, negative stigma towards mental illness. This stigma conspires to make mental illness disappear. It pushes people with mental illness and their fami-

lies out of the light and into the dark. Communities of faith can counteract this stigma by creating an atmosphere of acknowledgment and affirmation. In worship, the liturgy can expressly state God's love for people who live with mental illness. Litanies and prayers can include mental illness in general or name specific mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and acute depression. Sermons can name mental illness from the pulpit and encourage the congregation to embrace those families who need support. By bringing mental illness out of the closet and into the open, a faith community creates an atmosphere of welcome and respect.

Education about mental illness is another strategy for reducing the stigma of mental illness. Fear of mental illness comes from ignorance. Educating the congregation can dispell

fear and inspire new ideas for including those with mental illness.

One of the most important factors in promoting mental health is the amount of positive and supportive social interaction accessible to a person. A faith community is in a unique position. More than any other organization or institution, it can nurture human needs for meaning and belonging. Conversely it can destroy faith and confidence through insensitivity or neglect. Making sure to invite and accommodate families with mental illness in events and activities promotes the relational ties that are so important to the mental health and spiritual welfare of people. Affirmation nurtures and heals.

Why Work in Local Congregations?

Why does DAMI focus its work in local congregations? People with disabilities want to worship and belong in faith congregations. Why? People with disabilities and their families understand that a congregation is a group of people who know each other. In a congregation, people with disabilities can be known by name.

In congregations, friendships develop and last. Longterm relationships of nurture and support exist in congregations. People with disabilities enjoy friendships just as much as anyone else.

The problems of inclusion are small enough to handle in a congregation. Most congregations are of a size that transformation

and change are not beyond their energy and resources. The work to be done is scalable to the size of the congregation.

Spiritual needs related to the need for belonging are met most effectively in a local congregation. Removing the barriers to access at the local level gives people with disabilities the opportunity to thrive.

TIPS for Faith Communities to Support Families Living with Mental Illness

1. Name mental illness in the liturgy
2. Include it in litanies and prayers
3. Preach about it.
4. Create atmosphere of welcome - respect.
5. Increase knowledge of mental illness through education.
6. Accommodate mental illness in events & activities.

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DAMI is an independent
501(c)3 non-profit, founded
in 1991, whose mission is
to remove barriers in faith-
based communities that
prevent full participation of
people with disabilities in
community life.

*Religious
Disability
Resources*

American Baptists

Rev Rosalie Norman-
McNaney: Email to:
rmcnahey@abc-usa.org

Episcopal

ecdeaf.com
ahealingministry.com

Jewish Community

uscj.org/accessibility/

jfcsmpls.org/Services/
services.html#Inclusion

Lutheran

elca.org/disability

Mennonite

adnetonline.org

Presbyterian

pcusa.org/phewa/
pdc.htm

Unitarian

uaa.org/programs/jus-
tice
/accessibility/

United Methodist

gbgm-umc.org/DISC/

National Organizations

aamr.org
joniandfriends.org
nami.org
nod.org

Sending Your Kid to Camp

What's it like to send your kid to camp for the first time? What if your child has special needs or lives with multiple challenges? Lori Richardson faced these questions last summer, and here she writes "to any parent of a child who is challenged."

Last year I decided to send my 13 year old son to camp. It was a HUGE step for me, because I had never let him out from under my care. I struggled with worries like: Will he do ok? Will camp staff be able to care for him? Will they remember his meds? What if he wakes up at night? What if he gets scared? What if... What if... What if... Was I only hurting my son's chances by thinking he couldn't succeed at camp? Then I decided. I had to try. Talking with Ron at Disability Awareness Ministries, I felt safer. I drove my son to camp and anxiously dropped him off. On the

way home, I cried but kept driving. Bad weather came, and I was scared that he was scared. Then the phone call came. "Mom, I'm having a hard time." Without telling you all the little details, here is the message I want you to know. I trusted that God had purposely made allowances for my son to go to camp, so he was there for the right reason. With support from DAMI and help from his Integration Specialist, my son made it through the week. As I drove him home after camp, he told story after story of his experience. For the very first time my son had made friends; friends who are still in contact with him. His Integration Specialist had made the difference between my son's success and failure at camp. She NEVER gave up on him and cared for him as if he were in her own family. She never said never. My

son, who struggles socially, said, "Mom, do I get to go back next year, please? I really want to go back." With my son's challenges, asking to go back with a willing heart was an important growth step for him, and he was proud of what he had accomplished. This year my son will return to camp. It excites me to see how the Lord will grow him through the process and will grow me as a parent. I praise God for inclusive camping. If you wonder if your child will be safe as I did, read Proverbs 3:5 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart." Follow your heart; do just that. God will provide a way when you feel there is no way. I never would have imagined my son could go to camp and be so happy. Wow !!! How God taught me otherwise !
Lori R.

Adult Forum at Faith UMC

On Sunday, April 2, Faith UMC, St. Anthony, MN, invited DAMI to deliver a presentation on disability awareness to its Adult Faith Forum. Faith has recently completed remodeling their building to make it more accessible, including the installation of an elevator. They also have large print hymnals and assistive listening de-

vices in the sanctuary. So the members of the Faith Forum were looking for more advanced ideas.

One of the ideas we explored was proactively identifying people with disabilities in the congregation who have leadership skills that are not being used. Another idea was that people with disabilities don't need to be

fixed; faith communities need to be inclusive. Finally the members of the forum were invited to consider forming an Inclusion Team that can lead the congregation to identify new priorities for building on the inclusive successes it has already achieved.

Contact DAMI about a presentation at your church. 612-230-3264

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DONATIONS

Since the beginning of 2006, donations from individuals and churches have slowed to a mere trickle. DAMI is losing it's ability to meet its monthly expenses. One time gifts are helpful, but a pledge of a regular monthly or quarterly gift does much more to make this ministry stable. Please consider making a monthly or quarterly pledge.

DAMI Yearly Memberships

DAMI is a membership non-profit organization. The bylaws grant voting privileges at the Annual Meeting to persons who join DAMI and whose total gifts equal or exceed \$25 or 10 hours of volunteer service in a calendar year. (Gifts of less than \$25 are still welcome!)

Contribution Structure

- \$25 Friend
- \$50 Supporter
- \$100 Advocate
- \$500 Partner
- \$1000 Sustainer
- \$5000 Benefactor

JOIN DAMI TODAY !!!

Yes ! Sign me up for a one-year membership in DAMI !!!

New Member Renewing Upgrade

My check is enclosed for \$_____ payable to DAMI

NAME

Address

City/State/Zip

Phone/Email