



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: New free resource: Whole Hearted

Our ministry, especially in adult faith formation, calls us to be aware of the everyday lives and needs of the people and to respond, to accompany them on their life journey.

Are people today experiencing trauma? Are we responding? If you placed “trauma informed parish” in your web browser, you would immediately get 7,250,000 results.

The thing the church needs most today
is the ability to heal wounds
and to warm the hearts of the faithful.

~ Pope Francis

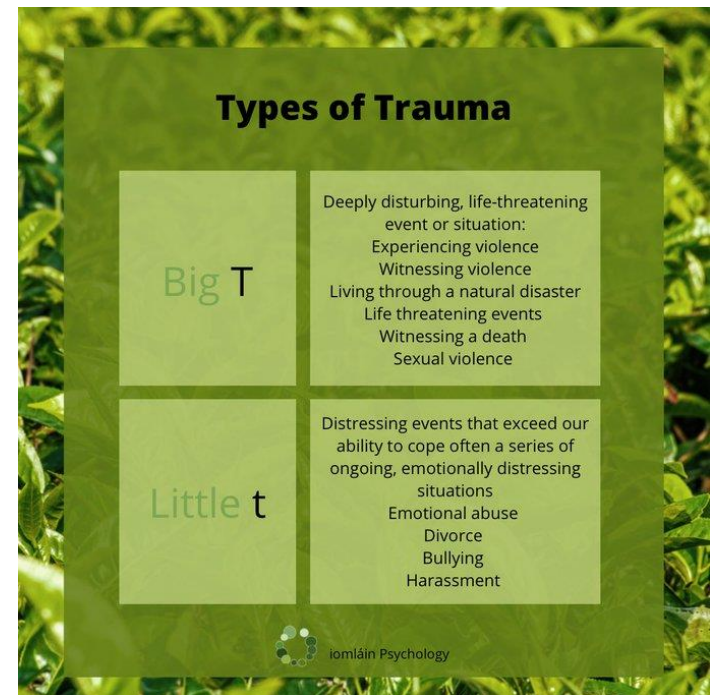
What is trauma?

- Trauma does not refer to the event; trauma speaks to the impact on one’s mind and emotions.
- Psychological trauma is damage to the mind as a result of a distressing event that exceeds one’s ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience. It is not permanent if addressed.
- Trauma may result from a single distressing experience or recurring events of being overwhelmed.
- Because trauma differs among individuals, people will react to similar traumatic events differently. Not all people who experience a potentially traumatic event will actually become traumatized.

Most researchers describe trauma as an overwhelming event or series of events that exhausts an individual’s internal and external resources.

- Acute trauma results from a single incident.

- Chronic trauma is repeated and prolonged such as domestic violence or abuse.
- Complex trauma is exposure to multiple and varied traumatic events, often invasive, interpersonal.
- Secondary trauma refers to the impact of observing another’s pain.
- Moral trauma stems from that which violates our conscience.

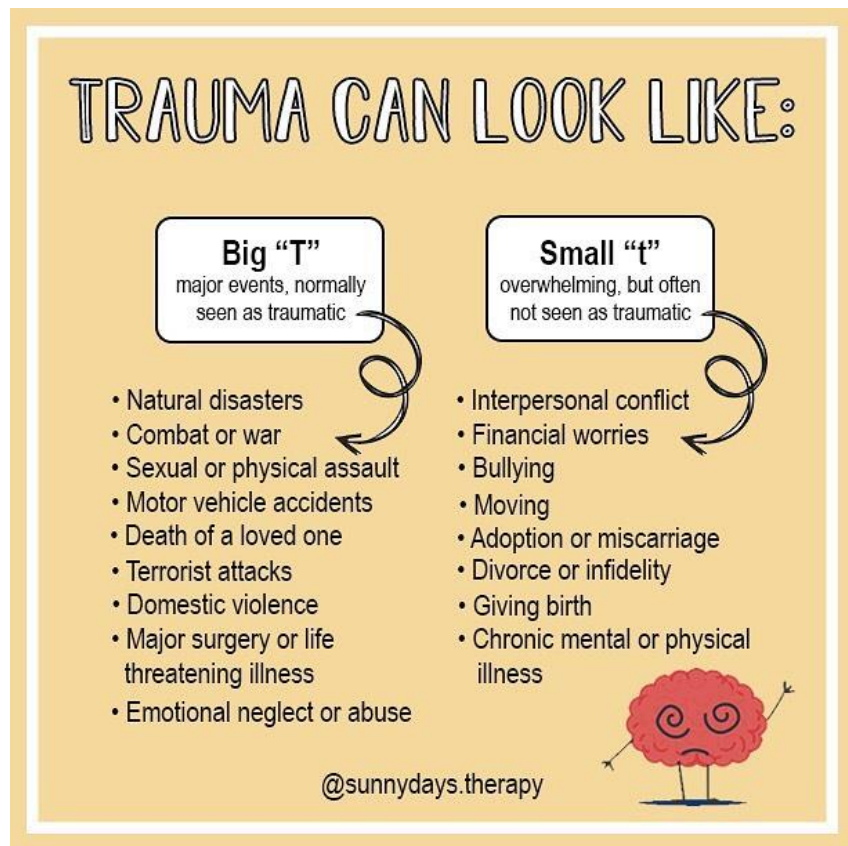


In 2020 (before the pandemic), the Barna Group (a public opinion research company) conducted interviews with over 1,000 practicing Christians (Protestant and Catholic), researching trauma in America, finding that:

- 20% of practicing Catholics report having a traumatic experience

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- 40% say the traumatic experience was the death of a loved one
- 33% say it was betrayal by a trusted individual
- 27% said they have experienced domestic violence; 22% experienced physical abuse; 21% sexual abuse
<https://shop.barna.com/products/trauma-in-america>
and <https://traumainamerica.bible/>



<https://www.facebook.com/sunnydayscounselling/posts/-trauma-is-trauma-what-comes-to-mind-when-you-think-of-the-word-trauma-when-most/2700101986897668/>

What does this mean for parishes today, for “trauma aware parishes”?

Parishes cannot do what mental health is far more equipped to do. We can do what mental health does not normally do: integrate spirituality and religious practices with good mental health information and exercises.

There are so many realities about our faith which are assets in healing trauma:

- Acceptance of mystery
- Trust in a Higher Power
- Experience of grace
- Practice of prayer
- Tribulation
- Lamentation
- Sacramentality and ritual
- Spirit in and among us
- The cross
- Paschal Mystery
- Life of faith
- Creator of Seasons
- Catholic Social Teachings

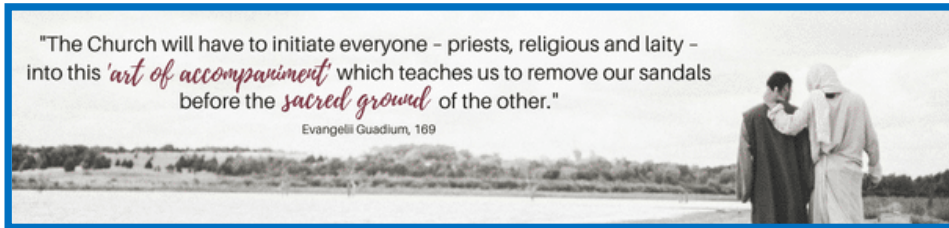
We, as parish and catechetical leaders, tend to ask:

- How do we get more people involved?
- Why don’t more people show up for our programs?
- Where are the parents?
- How can we get everyone more excited about their faith?

As a trauma aware parish, there is another question we must ask: **How can we better help our people; how can we accompany them on their life journeys?**

To become a trauma aware parish, it’s not just about catechesis and evangelization (which is our dominant hand), but we, first and foremost, use our other hand, the hand of listening.

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What can a trauma aware parish do:

- Demonstrate awareness of, and sensitivity to, trauma's impact on its members and their loved ones
- Helps parishioners recognize their experience of, and response to, trauma
- Provides restorative and spiritual professional resources in a variety of ways

Key questions for trauma aware parishes:

- How do we do each of these three things? Who will do it?
- How do we avoid doing this to simply making the parish more welcoming and hospitable (as important as that is)?
- How do we take seriously ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) without morphing from an adult-centered opportunity to another children's initiative?
- How can those facilitating trauma awareness programs learn to manage group dynamics, regulate the "fixers," "talkers," and "prayer-givers," and maintain that sturdy, trustworthy space where participants can do the difficult and intimate inner work of recognition, renewal and restoration?

Two examples of things trauma aware parishes might do to begin:

- Name it. Possibly add to the parish mission statement: "We are aware that sometimes life can be painful and overwhelming. We seek to support one another during these times." – or – "We are aware that

sometimes life can be painful and overwhelming. We are a community of support and sanctuary for one another during these times."

- Provide rituals and prayer, such as an evening of reflection on Veterans' Day; during the month of November a liturgy for deceased children

A New, Free Resource

Catholic Charities has published a free resource for parishes, *Whole Hearted*, which:

- Provides basic and helpful trauma awareness
- Is not clinical or professional mediation; does not do what mental health can do much better; it is not meant to replace professional health
- Presents information on trauma's impact and on how one might begin to move forward mentally and spirituality

Each of the four sessions (about an hour each) contains:

- Brief content
- Private reflection
- A practice for consideration
- Discussion
- Scriptural reflection

Real life examples, self-assessments, drawing, perspective-taking, guided imagery, breathing a Psalm, and journaling are integrated throughout. It is predominantly private work – a dialogue with the participant and the material - with only a little discussion and sharing.

Whole Hearted can be offered as a half-day of reflection or 4 weekly sessions. It can be presented virtually or in-person. Individuals could also work on their own.



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The following free downloadable resources:

- Participant Journal
- Facilitator Guide
- Participant Journal (Spanish)
- Facilitator Guide (Spanish)
- Participant Journal (Young Adult)

can be found at: <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/our-vision-and-ministry/leadership-development-catholic-identity/psm-and-behavioral-health>

Two videos and other resources can also be found here.

Trauma is not what happens to us,
but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness.

~ Peter A. Levine

Other resources

- For a fuller explanation of this resource (and background information on trauma) as well as other resources, visit: <https://www.ncclatholic.org/trauma-informed-parish-webinar.html>
- Beyond Trauma: *A Catholic Guide for Spiritual First Aid* from American Bible Society: <https://www.ncclatholic.org/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/abs-beyond-trauma-catholic-2020-07.pdf>



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - [https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons of aff - journal special issue.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf)