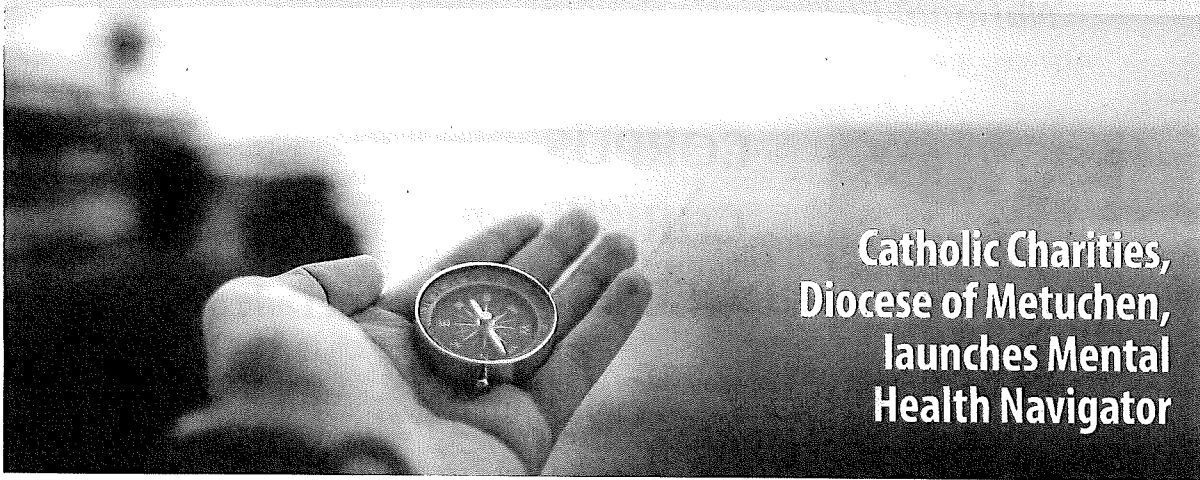


Stepping forward in charity



Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen, launches Mental Health Navigator

By Tiffany Workman
Special Contributor

The current mental health crisis affecting many people in our country has led Bishop James F. Checchio to request Catholic Charities, Diocese of Metuchen, to address this significant need.

As a leading social service provider in central and western New Jersey, CCDOM did just that and has launched a transformative initiative to address the pressing mental health crisis. Announced in February 2024, the innovative Mental Health Navigator program, rooted in the principles of Catholic social teaching, marks a significant step towards providing essential mental health support and resources to those in need.

Funded by the Bishop's Annual Appeal, the Mental Health Navigator is a free service available to all residents within the four counties of the Diocese of Metuchen (Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren), regardless of faith or background, to empower individuals to navigate the complexities of common barriers to care.

Julio Coto, executive director of CCDOM, underscored the urgency of the program's launch, stating, "Since the pandemic, the demand for mental health services has surged. The Mental Health Navigator is designed to offer a lifeline to those within our community who are struggling and need support.

"Current clients, prospective clients, parishioners, and students who attend schools in the Diocese of Metuchen will now have the opportunity to receive support and education on how to understand and obtain mental health services."

The program's design goes beyond mere assistance, offering vital resources and advocacy to ensure individuals

receive the care they deserve. Mental Health Navigators will aid residents in determining insurance coverage, provide recommendations for nearby resources, and offer guidance on what to expect when seeking assistance.

"It's happening right here in our local communities," said Anthony P. Kearns, Esq., CEO and chairman of the board of CCDOM. "Whether people are facing depression, isolation, loss of employment, substance abuse history, or a state of desperation, we need to be able to help those who need it. Catholic Charities takes its faith into action by providing services regardless of faith, ethnicity, and income."

"Many things are affecting the mental health crisis," stressed Bishop Checchio. "Our youth following the pandemic, the opioid crisis, and the assisted suicide initiatives pressuring our elderly, sick, and disabled, which indicates to those suffering that their lives are not worth much anymore. We believe that every life is a gift from God and is precious," he continued, stressing, "We need programs like the Mental Health Navigator to aid those in our communities to remind them that their life is precious and we're here to help."

With services provided in both English and Spanish, residents in Middlesex County seeking support through the Mental Health Navigator can access the program by calling 732-857-3811 or 908-333-2282 for those residents of Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren counties. Participants are encouraged to leave a message on a confidential voicemail line, ensuring prompt assistance within 24 hours.

Tiffany Workman is diocesan Communications Specialist. Gerald Witkowski, Jr. diocesan assistant director of communications contributed to this story.

Catholic Charities is offering a free service to assist residents of our Diocese in receiving support and education on how to understand and obtain mental health services and help remove the barriers that often exist when trying to figure out where to start.

The Navigator will –

- ✓ assist with educating you on how to find out if your Health Insurance will cover these services;
- ✓ make recommendations for resources that are near to your home or work;
- ✓ inform you on what to expect when you call for services;
- ✓ advocate for your rights within a challenging mental health system.

The Mental Health Navigation Services will be easy to access by two methods:

1. The QR code listed on the right will bring you to a screen with a few questions to complete. Navigator will contact you within 24 hours.
2. If you are not able or comfortable using the QR code, you can contact a confidential voicemail line where leaving your name, number, and a brief description will prompt a call back from a Navigator within 24 hours.



If you or a loved one would benefit from this service, please call • 732-857-3811 Middlesex County • 908-333-2282 Somerset, Hunterdon, Warren Counties

Spanish speaking navigator available • Tenemos navegadores we hablan español.