



WHOLE HEARTED
FACILITATOR
GUIDE

The Goal of *Whole Hearted*

Whole Hearted is meant to provide basic and helpful trauma awareness. It is not clinical or professional therapy. It informs participants of trauma's impact and how one might begin to move forward mentally and spiritually. The first two sessions focus on recognizing and responding to life's hard experiences. The last two sessions focus on the dynamics of renewal and restoration.

Whole Hearted introduces an ongoing process of:

- Recognition: Seeing your experience of trauma and assessing your response(s) to it.
- Renewal: Prayer and other spiritual exercises as sources for strength and newness.
- Restoration: The ongoing and intentional work needed to move forward in a healthy way.

These three dynamics of *Recognition*, *Renewal*, and *Restoration* do not have to be followed in a sequence. They are more like three rooms in a dwelling, each with its own unique purpose. Those dealing with the impact of trauma can spend as much time in each of these different spaces as they wish. And each of us can go from one room to another as needed. *Whole Hearted* is just an introduction to this ongoing process of inner work. However, persons who have experienced trauma are also recommended to seek professional treatment. *Whole Hearted* can be an excellent adjunct or addition to a therapeutic process.

Parishes and organizations can offer *Whole Hearted* as a day of reflection or four weekly sessions. Sessions take no more than 60 minutes and can be conducted onsite or remotely. If necessary, individuals can work through *Whole Hearted* on their own.

Each session plays on a different "word inside the word" within "whole" and features:

- Brief content
- Private reflection
- Suggested practice
- Discussion
- Scriptural reflection

In the end, this faith-based experience is focused on:

- Recognition of the assets and blessings God has provided, as well as the painful experiences that have impacted us.

- Prayer for new energy, hope, openness, and/or motivation to move forward.
- Assessment of personal interests, assumptions, expectations, behaviors, and responses that should now be re-evaluated.
- Identifying new or abiding interests, opportunities, and/or relationships worth pursuing.
- Acceptance of our lives as a whole with spiritual openness to what is to come.
- Awareness of spiritual practices and dynamics related to the process of restoration.

Facilitating this Program

Trauma is the experience of adversity that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience. Trauma is the experience, not the event.

Trauma does not have to be life-long, and there are many ways to seek healing.

Trauma may result from a single distressing experience or recurring events of being overwhelmed.

People will react differently to similar traumatic events. 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.

As a group facilitator, your role is to establish and maintain a safe, trustworthy place where people can do the difficult and intimate work of examination.

You are to establish and maintain what is sometimes referred to as "a holding environment" that holds participants' thoughts, feelings, comments, and experiences in a respectful and authentic way.

Your role can also be described by what you are NOT to do:

You are not to be a counselor.

You are not to be a problem solver.

You are not to be a prayer leader.

You are not to be a teacher.

You are not to minimize, evaluate, or re-state what someone says.

How do you establish and maintain this safe and trustworthy place where people can do this difficult and intimate work?

- Support all the voices in the group.
- Inform the group of *double* confidentiality: nothing said in the group can be shared outside of the group AND nothing said in the group can ever be brought up again except by the person who actually said it. Point out, however, that there is a moral obligation to share with proper authorities any comment made about hurting oneself or another.
- Gently, faithfully redirect/remind anyone who does what you are NOT to do (see above).
- Ask the group for feedback as to how things are going and ask, "Does anyone else have something they want to say?"
- Step aside during "For Reflection" and let participants do their own inner work.
- Give participants permission to "Pass or Play" during each discussion instead of expecting that everyone "take a turn."
- Occasionally invite participants to clarify, e. g. "Can you say more about that?"
- Check to see if participants understand the content being offered in the session.
- Have specific information on hand as to how participants can contact local professionals or access services such as Catholic Charities, etc. Remind participants of the value of "talking to" a professional about anything that seems to be overwhelming them.

"We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur."

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

In his talks and writings, Catholic theologian and storyteller John Shea often reminds us that the Spirit “illuminates the mind, activates the will, and gladdens the heart.”

Whole Hearted is designed to help participants:

- See the impact of a painful time and evaluate their current response to it.
- Pray for renewal.
- Invest in practices that encourage healthy spiritual lives.

The program closes with a reminder to participants that these three dynamics of Recognition, Renewal, and Restoration are ongoing and lifelong ways of sustaining the Spirit's presence.

Session Overview

Each session focuses on a different “word inside the word.”

Session 1: Whole Hearted

(We come with a whole heart full of experiences)

Participants reflect on:

- The value of the commitments they have made and are willing to keep.
- The resources and assets they have to live whole hearted lives.
- The moments of grace and dis-grace they have experienced.

This session can be summed up as the process of *Recognition*.

Dynamics include personal sharing around gratitude, the practice of “Collecting Moments of Grace” as a spiritual resource, and identification of their sources of support (assets), as well as a drawing exercise that reflects a painful experience.

Session 2: wHOLE hearted

(A painful experience has probably left a hole in our heart.)

Participants:

- Gain basic information regarding the cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual impact of trauma.
- Gain basic information regarding healthy responses we can make to the impact of trauma.
- Assess the “hole” in their heart caused by trauma.
- Discuss the ways they have responded to the impact of this trauma.

This session sheds light on the impact of trauma and points to the negative and positive ways of *Responding*. The principal dynamic is participant discussion around their responses to trauma.

Session 3: whOLE hearted

(It can be helpful to change something about our old heart.)

Participants:

- Reassess past ambitions, interests, desires, directions, perspectives, etc., with an eye for what might be best to let go of.
- Prayerfully ask God for “a new heart” – one that is free from the pain and/or limitations of the past and better suited for moving forward.
- Identify the life-giving commitments, relationships, and/or interests still to be pursued.

Through a Psalm, this session points to the role reassessment and prayer plays in the process of *Renewal*.

Principal dynamics include a Guided Imagery experience during which participants and Jesus discuss their experiences of being wounded, as well as a breathing experience of Praying a Psalm. A private prayer experience that participants can do on their own is also offered.

Session 4: Wholehearted

(It is best to move forward in a wholehearted way.)

Defined by Webster as “completely and sincerely devoted, determined, or enthusiastic. Marked by complete and earnest commitment.”

Participants:

- Consider accepting the whole of what their life has been.
- Personalize the spirituality of the Paschal Mystery’s experience of pain, loss, and new life.
- Select spiritual practices that can help them move wholeheartedly toward the “more” God has in store for them.
- Emphasize the continuous process of Recognition, Renewal, and Restoration as a means of responding to trauma.

This session points to the process of *Restoration*.

The principal dynamic engages participants in the exploration of their personal experience of the Paschal Mystery and the Catholic understanding of suffering, loss, and new beginnings. They are also asked to make note of listed spiritual practices that they may find helpful.

A Trauma-Aware Parish

Whole Hearted can serve as a resource for individual use or as a core component of a bigger effort: becoming a trauma-aware parish.

Trauma impairs many more of our parishioners than we think. Pain related to disease, divorce, death, displacement, drugs, loss of jobs, loss of dreams, lack of income, family conflicts, betrayal, and a host of other experiences has physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual impact.

It is the impact of these experiences that can be traumatic, affecting our brains, our social interactions, our ability to get tasks done, our ability to communicate clearly, our sleeping and eating habits, our health, our spirituality, and our overall state of mind.

“The Church will have to initiate everyone - priests, religious and laity - into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.”

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

Being a trauma-aware parish or organization is a pastoral response that:

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

A trauma-aware parish integrates spirituality and religious practices with sound and basic mental health information and practices.

Even more importantly, trauma-aware parishes should not try to do what mental professionals are far better equipped to do.

Being a trauma-aware parish includes showing parishioners how to quickly access professional help, as well as informing them of the services support organizations, such as Catholic Charities, may provide.

Being a trauma-aware parish means maintaining a sharp and simplified focus on the impact and responses to trauma, not simply improving the parish’s welcoming climate.

A trauma-aware parish takes seriously the impact of Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs) while still making trauma awareness initiatives an adult-centered effort and not another child-centered program.

Becoming a trauma-aware parish cannot become “another thing” parish leaders are asked to do.



The mission of Catholic Charities is to provide service to people in need, to advocate for justice in social structures, and to call the entire church and other people of good will to do the same.