



Catholic Clergy and PTSD

We share this information about PTSD that specifically addresses secondary traumatic stress among Catholic Priests. PTSD can affect Catholic Clergy just as it can affect anyone exposed to traumatic events. Priests, deacons, bishops, religious brothers and sisters, chaplains, and other clergy may encounter trauma through their ministry or personal experiences.

Clergy may develop PTSD after experiences such as:

- Providing pastoral care during accidents, disasters, or violence
- Serving as military or hospital chaplains
- Witnessing deaths, suicides, or severe suffering
- Being victims of assault, abuse, or other traumatic events
- Experiencing secondary or vicarious trauma from repeatedly hearing traumatic stories during counseling, confession, or pastoral ministry

Symptoms may include:

- Intrusive memories or nightmares
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- Anxiety, hypervigilance, or irritability
- Emotional numbness

- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or spiritual distress

Unique Challenges for Clergy:

- Feeling pressure to remain strong for parishioners
- Reluctant to seek help because of concerns about stigma
- Difficulty balancing spiritual explanations with psychological symptoms
- Some clergy may interpret symptoms primarily as spiritual struggles when they also have a psychological component requiring professional care.
- Isolation-especially in assignments with limited peer support

Faith and Recovery:

Catholic teaching recognizes the importance of caring for body, mind, and spirit. Spiritual practices can support recovery, including:

- Prayer and meditation
- Participation in the sacraments
- Spiritual direction
- Support from trusted clergy and faith communities; however, spiritual support is generally most effective when combined with evidence-based mental health treatment when PTSD is present.

If you or someone you know is struggling, there are treatment options including:

- Trauma-focused psychotherapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Medication when appropriate
- Peer support and clergy wellness programs

Please know that SJVC offers all the treatment options mentioned above. Call us for a confidential phone call at 888.993.8885.

For the full article on Secondary Traumatic Stress Among Catholic Priests, by Richard Ehusani, [click here](#).

And, for more details on PTSD, [click here](#).