

Warren Suicide Highlights Need for Church to Address Mental Illness

Condolences are pouring in for Rick Warren after his 27-year-old son, Matthew, committed suicide over the weekend. Matthew had suffered from mental illness long before taking his own life.

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, says his heart stands broken in the wake of the Warren family's loss.

"We pray for healing and strength for the Warren and Saddleback family. Yet, this tragedy facilitates an opportunity, if not an obligation, for the Christian community to address mental illness," Rodriguez says. "Mental illness exists in and outside of the church community. Christians struggle with depression and even suicidal thoughts. It does not make you less of a Christian. Just like heart disease or cancer does not dilute our Christianity, neither does mental illness."

Nevertheless, Rodriguez says, we must stand committed to "creating space" and providing ministry to those who struggle with depression and other mental illnesses. In partnership with medical professionals, he says, the church of Jesus Christ can bring attention to this silent illness with grace, compassion and love.

"For at the end of day, suffering from mental illness is not a sin," Rodriguez says. "Yet, not addressing it may very well be."