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Archbishop calls for support for those living with autism

by Bridget Kelly by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- The church needs to address the alienation often surrounding those living with autism, especially children and young people, by coming to the aid of those affected, said Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski.

The archbishop, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry, said those who draw near to people with autism can help break down the barriers of silence and join in them in solidarity and prayer.

The archbishop made his comments in the council's message for Monday, the Fifth World Autism Awareness Day.

"The church sees as impelling the task of placing herself at the side of these people -- children and young people in particular -- and their families, if not to break down these barriers of silence then at least to share in solidarity and prayer in their journey of suffering," the archbishop said.

Along with suffering often come frustration and resignation, especially from the families of those affected, said the archbishop. Families experience repercussions and are often "led to be closed up in an isolation that marginalizes and wounds," he said.

Zimowski said he hopes that all people of good will and the church may become "traveling companions" with people suffering from autism and express their awareness, supportiveness and sensitivity to those affected.

He thanked families, communities, health care workers, educators, professionals and volunteers for their constant support. He also encouraged the continuation of scientific research and health care policies that could increase diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitative responses to autism.

Zimowski concluded his message by reminding family members that, "they are passionately loved by God," and they are never alone despite their challenging duties.

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