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Bishop Kevin Vann and Rick Warren collaborate on mental health conference

by Monica Clark

NCR Today

The Diocese of Orange, Calif. is joining with Saddleback Church and the National Alliance on Mental Illness to convene a day-long conference March 28 on mental health and the church. The conference grew out of conversations between Bishop Kevin Vann and Pastor Rick Warren, Saddleback's founder, after the suicide of Warren's 27-year-old son last year.

Vann and Warren, leaders of the two largest church communities in Orange County, began meeting together shortly after Vann came to Orange in September 2012. This conference is their first collaborative effort.

Ryan Lilyengren, diocesan director of communications, said the diocese wants to prepare its priests and pastoral staffs with the specific skills and resources needed to help those experiencing a mental health crisis. "The church is often the first place people call," said Lilyengren.

The conference, to be held at the Saddleback campus in Lake Forest, will explore the church's role in mental health, crisis management for church staffs, and integrating physical, spiritual and mental health.

The diocese operates a 24-hour counseling hotline, New Hope Ministries, which responds to about 40 calls a day. It was part of the Crystal Cathedral when the diocese purchased the properties for its new cathedral. "We knew we couldn't end this," said

Lilyengren. The ministry is now overseen by Catholic Charities.

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