



International Association
Catholic Mental
Health Ministers

ACT: Accompaniment and Connection Training

Vignette 1-A Stress and Grief

SETTING: Parish community room, after Sunday service. GEORGE (50s) sits alone on a bench, staring at nothing. LAURA approaches with forced brightness.

LAURA: George! There you are. I've been looking for you.

GEORGE: (doesn't look up) Oh. Hi, Laura.

LAURA: (sits down next to him, too close) How are you doing? It's been, what... three months now?

GEORGE: (quiet) Three and a half.

LAURA: Well, you know what they say - time heals all wounds! And I'm sure Sarah wouldn't want you sitting here looking so sad. She'd want you to move forward, right?

GEORGE: (shifts uncomfortably) I... I guess.

LAURA: You know, when my aunt died, I was devastated too. But then I realized - she's in a better place! She's with Jesus now, George. That's something to celebrate.

GEORGE: (voice flat) Yeah..

LAURA: And God has a plan, remember? We might not understand it, but everything happens for a reason. Sarah's death - there's a purpose in it.

GEORGE: (looks away) Right.

LAURA: You just need to pray more. Have you been praying? Prayer changes everything. And you should really come back to Bible study. Keeping busy helps, you know. Idle hands and all that.

GEORGE: (stands up) I should... I should go.

LAURA: Oh! Well, just remember - God never gives us more than we can handle! You're strong, George. You'll get through this.

GEORGE: (walking away) Thanks, Laura.

LAURA: (calling after him) And smile! Sarah would want to see you smile! (George exits)

Vignette 1-B: PFA for Coping with Stress - Grief

SETTING: Same parish community room. GEORGE sits alone. LAURA approaches, but this time she's calm, unhurried.

LAURA: George. May I sit with you for a moment?

GEORGE: Oh. Yeah, sure.

LAURA: (sits, leaving space between them, doesn't rush to fill silence) How are you doing?

GEORGE: Everyone keeps saying it'll get better. That time will heal. But it's not... it's not getting better, Laura. It's getting harder.

LAURA: Harder how?

GEORGE: The shock wore off. Now it's just... real. Every morning I wake up and for one second I forget, and then I remember, and it's like... it's like losing her all over again. Every single day.

LAURA: That sounds unbearable.

GEORGE: (voice breaking) It is. And everyone at church is so... they mean well, but they keep telling me she's in a better place, I have faith, but right now I'm just... I'm angry. I'm so angry.

LAURA: (doesn't flinch) At God?

Vignette 2-A: Depression

SETTING: Church library. MICHELLE (30s) sits at a table, staring blankly at her phone. LINDA enters, sees her, approaches with bright energy.

LINDA: Michelle! Hey! I haven't seen you at Bible study in weeks. We've missed you!

MICHELLE: (barely looks up) Oh. Yeah. I've just been... tired.

LINDA: (sits down across from her) Tired? Come on, we're all tired! That's life, right? (laughs) But you can't let that stop you. You've got to push through!

MICHELLE: (quiet) I guess.

LINDA: Are you not sleeping well? You should try melatonin. Or maybe you're sleeping too much? My cousin had that problem and she just set an alarm and forced herself to get up early.

MICHELLE: It's not really about sleep.

LINDA: Well, what is it then? You need to get out, get some exercise, get those endorphins going. Depression is all about brain chemistry, right? So, you've got to do things that boost your mood.

MICHELLE: (looking down) I don't think I have depression.

LINDA: Oh honey, we all get a little depressed sometimes. But you've got to make a choice to be happy. I know it sounds harsh, but it's true - happiness is a choice.

MICHELLE: (voice barely audible) Okay.

LINDA: And you need to think about your husband, your kids - they need you to be present. They need you to show up. You can't just check out because you're feeling down.

MICHELLE: (eyes filling with tears) I'm not trying to check out.

LINDA: Pray about it. Ask God for strength. Maybe come back to Bible study - being around positive people will help.

MICHELLE: (stands up) I should go. I have to... I need to pick up my kids.

LINDA: Okay, but think about what I said. You've got everything to be grateful for - a husband who loves you, beautiful kids, a good life. Sometimes we just need to count our blessings and realize how good we have it.

MICHELLE: Right. Thanks, Linda. (Michelle exits quickly)

Vignette 2-B: PFA for Active Listening and Depression

SETTING: Same church library. MICHELLE sits at the table, staring at her phone. LINDA enters, sees her, approaches gently.

LINDA: Michelle? Hi. Is it okay if I join you for a minute? (sits, leaving space) How are you doing?

MICHELLE: I don't know. Not great. Everything feels heavy. I'm sorry, I don't want to burden you.

LINDA: You're not burdening me. How long has this been going on?

MICHELLE: Maybe six months? I can't get out of bed in the morning. I mean, I do - I have to, for my kids - but it takes everything I have. Nothing feels good.

LINDA: That sounds exhausting.

MICHELLE: (tears forming) It is. And I feel so guilty because I have a good life. I have a husband who loves me, kids who need me. I know I'm not crazy. But I think I'm depressed.

LINDA: Depression isn't being crazy. It's a medical condition that affects how your brain functions.

MICHELLE: I thought if I just prayed more, or had more faith...

LINDA: Prayer is important. But depression is a health problem. You wouldn't tell someone with diabetes they just need to pray harder for their pancreas to work, right? Would you be open to talking to someone? A doctor, or a therapist?

MICHELLE: (hesitates) I'm scared. That they'll think I'm a bad mom.

LINDA: (firm but gentle) Michelle, seeking help for depression doesn't make you a bad mom. It makes you a good mom. Because you're taking care of yourself so you can take care of them.

MICHELLE: Okay. I think... I think I need to do something.

LINDA: That's really brave. And Michelle? If you need to talk, if you need someone to sit with you, if you just need someone to know what you're going through - I'm here.

MICHELLE: Thank you. Really. Thank you.

LINDA: You don't have to thank me. This is what we're supposed to do for each other. Can I check in with you in a few days?

MICHELLE: Yeah. I'd like that.

Vignette 3-A: Addiction

SETTING: Church parking lot after evening Mass. CARLOS leans against his car, exhausted. THOMAS approaches.

THOMAS: Carlos! Hey man, haven't seen you at men's group lately. Everything okay?

CARLOS: (looks around, lowers voice) It's my brother. Miguel. He's using again.

THOMAS: Look, I'm going to be straight with you because somebody needs to say it - you're enabling him. Every time you bail him out, every time you let him stay at your place - you're making it easier for him to keep using.

CARLOS: He's my brother. What am I supposed to do, let him die on the streets?

THOMAS: Sometimes people need to hit rock bottom before they get serious about recovery.

CARLOS: (angry) You don't understand. He has nowhere else to go.

THOMAS: That's his problem, not yours. You've got your own family to think about. How is this affecting them?

CARLOS: My wife is... she's at her limit. She doesn't want him in the house anymore.

THOMAS: Of course she doesn't! Tell Miguel he can't come back until he's sober. Tough love - that's what he needs.

CARLOS: I've tried that. He just disappears and I don't know if he's alive or dead.

THOMAS: That's his choice, Carlos. You can't save someone who doesn't want to be saved. Miguel is using you and so that he can go get high again.

CARLOS: (voice tight) He's not using me. He's sick.

THOMAS: He's sick because he keeps choosing drugs over his family. That's on him, not you. Tell him you're done until he gets serious about rehab.

CARLOS: (defeated) I don't think I can do that.

THOMAS: Then you're part of the problem. Look, I know that sounds harsh. You can't set yourself on fire to keep someone else warm.

CARLOS: (nods numbly) Yeah. Okay. I should go.

THOMAS: Think about what I said. And pray about it. God will show you what to do.

CARLOS: (gets in car) Right. Thanks. (Carlos drives away)

Vignette 3-B: PFA Communication and Addiction

SETTING: Same church parking lot. CARLOS leans against his car, exhausted. THOMAS approaches.

THOMAS: Carlos. Hey. You look exhausted, man. You okay?

CARLOS: Not really. It's my brother. Miguel. He's using again.

THOMAS: Want to talk about it? How are you holding up? Can you tell me what's going on?

CARLOS: He showed up at my house three weeks ago. High, broke, nowhere to go. I couldn't just turn him away. My wife won't let him in the main house with the kids. And I get it, I do. But he's my brother. And I see him out there, shaking, sweating, and I just...

THOMAS: You feel like you're failing him either way.

CARLOS: Yes. If I let him stay, I'm enabling him - that's what everyone says. But if I kick him out, what if I find out he overdosed in some alley and died and the last thing I did was turn him away?

THOMAS: That's an impossible position to be in.

CARLOS: (wipes eyes) I just want him to be okay. I want my brother back.

THOMAS: I know. And that's not weakness, that's love. But here's what I want you to hear - Miguel's addiction is not your fault. And it's not your responsibility to fix it.

CARLOS: Then what am I supposed to do?

THOMAS: Have you talked to anyone? A counselor? A support group for families dealing with addiction? Like Al-Anon, Nar-Anon - People who understand what you're going through. Would you be open to that?

CARLOS: (hesitates) Maybe. I don't know. I just feel so alone in this.

THOMAS: You're not alone. If you need to talk, if you need someone who won't judge you, if you just need to sit in your car and cry - call me. Anytime.

CARLOS: Thank you. I mean it.

THOMAS: Do you want me to help you find a support group? I can look some up, send you information?

CARLOS: Yeah. Yeah, I think I need that.

THOMAS: Okay. I'll get you some resources. You're doing the best you can in an impossible situation. That's all anyone can do. (They shake hands. Carlos gets in his car)

Vignette 4-A: Psychosis

SETTING: Parish hall kitchen. LUCY (40s) is washing dishes alone after a parish event. She's visibly tense, jumping at sounds. CAROL enters.

CAROL: Lucy! There you are, hiding in the kitchen again.

LUCY: (lowers voice, moves closer) Carol, can I tell you something? Something's going on. I think... I think people are watching me.

CAROL: (laughs lightly) Watching you? What do you mean?

LUCY: I know it sounds crazy. But there are these cars that keep parking outside my house. The same cars, different days. And my neighbor - he's been talking to people. I've seen him. And at work, people stop talking when I walk in the room.

CAROL: Lucy, honey - I think you're just stressed. Everyone's stressed right now.

LUCY: No, it's not stress. This is real. Something is happening. I've been keeping notes, writing down license plates, times...

CAROL: (gently but dismissively) Oh, Lucy. I think you might be overthinking this. You've always been a little anxious, right? Maybe you need a vacation.

LUCY: (frustrated) I'm not anxious. I'm telling you what I've seen. Why won't anyone believe me?

CAROL: I believe that you believe it. But think about it rationally - why would anyone watch you? There's no reason for that.

LUCY: (defensive) I don't know why. But I know what I see.

CAROL: Look, I'm not trying to dismiss you. But I really think this is anxiety. Maybe talk to your doctor about medication? Something to take the edge off?

LUCY: (pulling back) I'm not crazy. I don't need medication.

CAROL: I didn't say you were crazy. I just think you're under a lot of stress and your mind is playing tricks on you.

LUCY: (turns back to dishes) I'm fine. Really. Forget I said anything.

CAROL: (after a pause) Lucy, don't be like that. I'm trying to help. I'm sure it will all seem less scary after a good night's sleep. (Carol exits. Lucy stares at the dishes, more alone and more frightened than before.)

Vignette 4-B: PFA and Psychosis

SETTING: Same parish hall kitchen. LUCY washes dishes alone, tense. CAROL enters.

CAROL: Lucy? Hey. You okay? You seemed really on edge tonight.

LUCY: (startled) Sorry. I'm just... I'm not great.

CAROL: Do you want to talk about it?

LUCY: (long pause) Can I tell you something? And you won't think I'm crazy?

CAROL: (sits on a kitchen stool, full attention) Of course. What's going on?

LUCY: I think someone is watching me. There are cars outside my house. The same cars. Different days. And people at work stop talking when I walk in. And my neighbor - he's been talking to people, making calls. I've been keeping notes.

CAROL: That sounds really frightening.

LUCY: It is. I'm scared all the time. I can't sleep. I keep checking the windows. I lock the doors and then check them again. It's exhausting.

CAROL: How long have you been feeling this way?

LUCY: A few months. It started small and then it just... grew. Now it's all I can think about.

CAROL: Lucy, I wasn't there; I didn't see what you saw. But what I can see right now is that you're exhausted and scared and you've been carrying this alone for months. And you deserve help with that, from someone qualified.

LUCY: A psychiatrist? (pulls back slightly)

CAROL: Or your regular doctor, to start. Just a conversation with your doctor about what you've been experiencing. Would that feel manageable?

LUCY: What if they don't believe me either?

CAROL: Then you find a doctor who does. You deserve to be taken seriously. Would it help if I came with you?

LUCY: You would do that?

CAROL: Of course I would. You shouldn't have to do this alone. Can we make a plan? This week - you call your doctor. And you call me before you go. Can you do that?

LUCY: Yeah. I think I can do that.

CAROL: Good. And Lucy - whatever is happening, whatever the doctor says, I'm not going anywhere. You're not alone in this.