



WEEKLY

Newsletter



Editor's Note,

Welcome to the first edition of our newsletter in 2026!

The first weeks of the year marked a meaningful and reflective beginning for the Initiative for Cognitive Therapies and Mental Health (ICTMH). Through the Mental Health Wellness Week, the Campus Hub Online Conference, and the Mental Health Training, ICTMH focused on the shared theme "The Role of Faith in Mental Health Recovery." These activities highlighted the organization's commitment to holistic, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based mental health care.

During the Mental Health Wellness Week, participants took part in daily reflections that showed how faith can provide hope, purpose, emotional rest, and strength during difficult times. Through personal stories, open discussions, and moments of quiet reflection, the sessions created safe and supportive spaces. This encouraged honest conversations about mental health, reduced stigma, and helped participants feel less alone in their struggles.

The Campus Hub Online Conference expanded this impact by focusing on students and young people. Discussions addressed common challenges such as academic pressure, peer influence, digital identity, and the need for healthy connection. With guidance from mental health professionals and active engagement from participants, the conference improved mental health awareness and equipped students with practical coping skills.

The Mental Health Training added depth to the discussions by stressing the importance of ethically and responsibly combining faith with clinical mental health practice. It clearly emphasized that faith should support professional care, not replace it.

Together, these initiatives reflect ICTMH's vision of promoting mental well-being through compassion, collaboration, and respect for different belief systems, setting a clear and purposeful direction for the year ahead.

Ese Ogheneovo
for ICTMH

Weekly Webinar Training

Friday Training Session Review

Date: January 9th, 2026

Venue: Virtual

Topic: The Role of Faith in Mental Health Recovery

Guest Speaker: Dr. (Chaplain) David Thompson,

Host: Initiative for Cognitive Therapy and Mental Health (ICTMH)

Introduction

Mental health recovery is most effective when care reflects the full complexity of human experience, including cultural and spiritual beliefs. Recognizing the influential role of faith in how many individuals understand distress and seek support, ICTMH hosted its first Mental Health Training of 2026 titled "The Role of Faith in Mental Health Recovery." The training promoted collaboration rather than competition between faith and science, highlighting integrated approaches that strengthen recovery, reduce stigma, enhance community well-being, and explore how spirituality can ethically and effectively complement evidence-based mental health care.

Faith: a Protective & Healing Resource

Research highlighted during the session shows that spiritual involvement is associated with greater emotional stability, resilience, social support, and meaning-making during suffering. Participants were particularly struck by findings that 86% of individuals deeply engaged in faith report lower alcohol abuse, while 84% show protection against drug use. Additionally, youth who value faith were reported to be up to eight times less likely to engage in high-risk substance-related behaviors. Faith was described as providing hope during anxiety, depression, and emotional distress, without denying the reality of pain.

Faith Communities as First Responders

The session emphasized that faith communities often serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing mental health challenges, especially in low-resource and culturally diverse settings. While this positions faith leaders as critical allies in mental health care, Dr. Thompson emphasized the need to respect professional limits, refer people for help when necessary, and avoid treating mental illness as only a spiritual issue or downplaying serious symptoms.

WHAT IS FAITH?



Faith is a deep belief or trust in something or someone, even without concrete evidence or tangible proof.

It is based on inner conviction and may be related to religious, spiritual, or personal aspects.

Faith involves trusting in something or someone beyond what can be scientifically proven.

It is a force that drives us to believe in what we cannot see and to maintain hope even in difficult situations.

Faith can provide comfort, inspiration, and motivation, and can be a source of strength and guidance in life.

Breakout Sessions and Participant Reflections

Participants were divided into interactive breakout groups to reflect on key themes from the training and apply them to real-world practice. The discussions focused on:

- **Meaning-Making in Suffering:** Participants explored how faith can help individuals interpret pain without denying clinical realities, supporting hope and emotional endurance during recovery.
- **Youth Protection and Risk Reduction:** Groups discussed the protective role of faith in reducing substance abuse and risky behaviours among young people, while stressing the need for age-appropriate, non-coercive engagement.
- **Collaboration Between Faith Leaders and Clinicians:** Emphasis was placed on referral pathways, shared training, and mutual respect between spiritual caregivers and mental health professionals.
- **Holistic Care Pathways:** Participants highlighted the importance of integrating spiritual, psychological, and social supports for sustainable recovery outcomes.

Participant's real voices

- *“Faith should be a bridge to healing, not a barrier to professional help.”*
- *“Prayer and therapy are not competitors; they are partners when used ethically.”*
- *“Faith leaders are often first responders, but they must know when to refer.”*
- *“Mental illness is not a spiritual failure—it is a human experience that deserves care.”*
- *“Integrated care works best when dignity, consent, and evidence guide practice.”*

Healthy Integration and Ethical Practice

Participants were guided through models of healthy faith integration, including respectful spiritual assessment, consent-based use of prayer or meditation, and inclusive approaches for non-religious individuals. Harmful practices to avoid included framing mental illness as punishment, discouraging professional help, or creating stigma around therapy and medication.

Key Quotes from Dr. (Chaplain) David Thompson

- *“Faith is a protective and healing resource, but it is never a replacement for professional care.”*
- *“Spiritual involvement can provide hope, resilience, and meaning without denying the reality of suffering.”*
- *“Faith communities often serve as the first point of contact for mental health challenges, making collaboration essential.”*
- *“Ethical integration means respecting boundaries, obtaining consent, and avoiding the spiritualization of mental illness.”*
- *“Healthy recovery happens when faith and clinical care work as partners, guided by mutual respect and evidence-based practice.”*
- *“Discouraging therapy or framing mental illness as punishment harms those we seek to help.”*

Conclusion

The training reaffirmed ICTMH's commitment to advancing integrated, culturally responsive, and evidence-based mental health care, strengthening collaboration between faith and mental health systems for improved community well-being.

Weekly WhatsApp Interactive Session

ICTMH Mental Health Week Report

Theme: The Role of Faith in Mental Health Recovery

Date: January 2026

compiled by: Dr. Elizabeth Idowu

Overview

The Initiative for Cognitive Therapies and Mental Health (ICTMH) successfully facilitated its Mental Health Wellness Week from 5th – 11th January 2026, centered on the theme “The Role of Faith in Mental Health Recovery.”

The week explored how faith, spirituality, and personal belief systems can serve as sources of strength, meaning, hope, and emotional grounding during periods of psychological distress. Discussions emphasized that while faith does not eliminate life's challenges, it can provide resilience, inner calm, and supportive frameworks for coping, healing, and emotional restoration.

Through reflective storytelling, guided questions, interactive polls, and shared experiences, participants engaged deeply with the theme, fostering openness, connection, and reduced stigma around mental health and faith-based coping. Engagement across the week remained strong, with participants contributing thoughtfully to daily prompts and discussions.

Daily Highlights

Reset Monday

Participants were welcomed into the week with an invitation to renew, refocus, and recharge. Reset Monday encouraged reflection on past disappointments and the intentional release of emotional burdens carried into the new year.

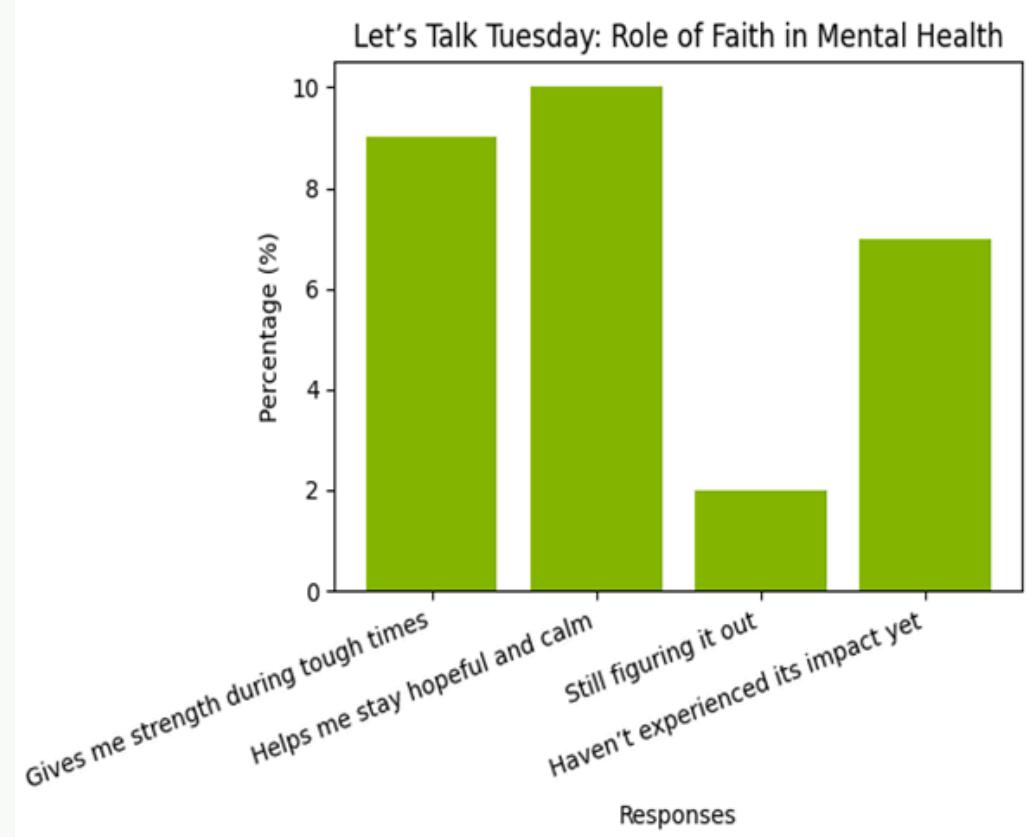
Using a relatable story, the session highlighted how a simple decision to shift mindset can transform frustration into opportunity and stagnation into progress. Participants were encouraged to give thanks for past lessons, release what no longer served them, and step into the new week with clarity, gratitude, and renewed purpose.

Let's Talk Tuesday

Building on the reflective reset, Tuesday focused on open dialogue around faith and mental health recovery.

Participants explored how faith can offer strength, peace, and hope, even when challenges persist.

An interactive poll was conducted to understand participants' experiences:



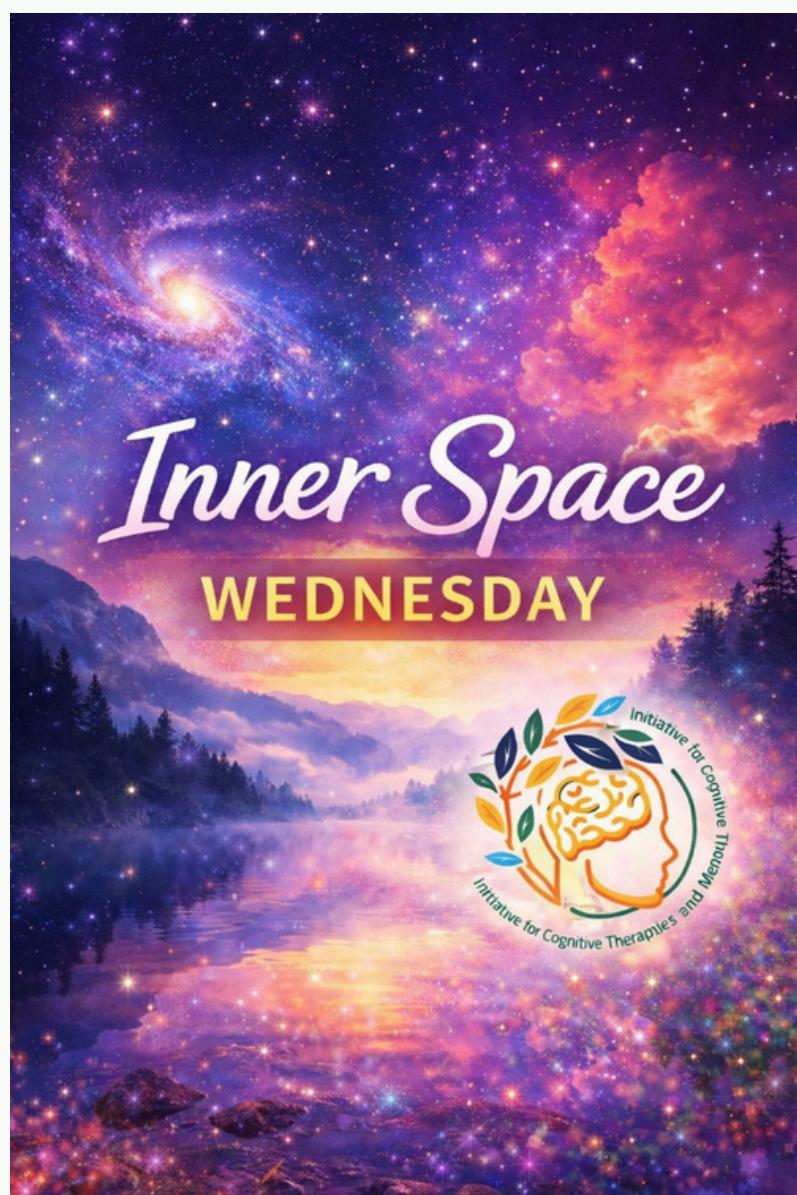
Key Insights

- *Strength during tough times (9%): A notable portion of respondents rely on it as a source of inner strength and resilience when facing difficulties. This indicates its role in helping individuals endure stress and adversity.*
- *Hope and calm (10%): This was the most selected response, showing that many participants experience emotional regulation benefits, such as reduced anxiety, increased peace, and optimism.*
- *Still figuring it out (2%): A small minority are in an exploratory phase, suggesting uncertainty or limited engagement, but also openness to learning more.*
- *No experienced impact yet (7%): Some respondents have not personally felt its influence, which may reflect limited exposure, differing belief systems, or unmet expectations.*

Inner Space Wednesday

Inner Space Wednesday invited participants into stillness and inward reflection. The focus shifted from discussion to quiet awareness, emphasizing how healing can emerge from moments of calm rather than constant activity or answers.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on how faith supports them when their minds feel overwhelmed and their lives feel noisy. The session provided a gentle space for storytelling, emotional expression, and shared comfort, reinforcing the message that stillness itself can be healing.



Reframe Thursday

Reframe Thursday encouraged participants to shift perspective and examine how meaning influences emotional weight. The session highlighted how faith can help individuals pause, question unhelpful interpretations, and discover alternative ways of understanding difficult experiences. Participants reflected on how reframing does not erase pain but can reduce its emotional burden, allowing space for growth, insight, and renewed strength. The discussion invited honest reflection on personal situations that may benefit from a gentler, faith-informed perspective.

Safe Space Friday

Safe Space Friday emphasized the importance of emotional safety and belonging. Participants were reminded that healing often requires spaces where individuals feel heard, accepted, and free from judgment. Discussions explored the idea that safe spaces may take many forms—trusted people, quiet moments, prayer, or supportive communities. The platform itself was reaffirmed as a safe environment for expression, connection, and emotional relief, encouraging participants to enter the weekend with ease and reassurance.

Rested Heart Saturday

Rested Heart Saturday focused on emotional rest, highlighting that rest involves more than sleep it includes calming the heart and releasing internal pressure.

Participants were encouraged to slow down, practice self-kindness, and engage in activities that restore inner peace. The message reinforced the importance of self-care and emotional boundaries, reminding participants that one cannot pour from an empty cup.

Stillness Sunday

Stillness Sunday closed the week with a reflection on presence, balance, and intentional rest.

Participants were invited to reconsider how constant busyness affects mental health, family relationships, and emotional well-being.

The session emphasized that stillness is not laziness, but a form of care. Parents were reminded that children need presence as much as provision, and that moments of connection, listening, and shared laughter are vital for both emotional health and relational bonding.

A Sneak Peek into ICTMH Campus

Wellness Hub's Conference

Theme

Thriving Minds in a Connected World



Dr. Nafisatu Hayatuddeen



Dr. Muhammad Gidado Ibrahim



Rev. Fr. Fidelis Bature



Dr. Grace Otu Effiong

The ICTMH Campus Hub Online Conference 2026 was successfully conducted over a two-day period, with all planned sessions delivered as scheduled on the 11th and 12th of January, 2026. A total of 260 participants registered for the conference.

Rationale for the Conference

The ICTMH Campus Hub Online Conference was conceived in response to the growing mental health challenges faced by students. These challenges include academic pressure, peer influence, digital stress, and limited access to accurate mental health information and support.

The conference aimed to:

- Provide early mental health education
- Promote mental health literacy
- Reduce stigma associated with mental health concerns
- Equip students with practical strategies for managing stress and maintaining emotional well-being

Conference Sessions and Facilitators

- Session 1: Breaking Point: When Stress Becomes Crisis
- Facilitator: Dr. Nafisatu Hayatuddeen
- Session 2: From Pressure to Purpose: Navigating Stress & Peer Influence
- Facilitator: Dr. Muhammad Gidado Ibrahim
- Session 3: The Digital Double-Edged Sword: Social Media & Identity
- Facilitator: Dr. Grace Otu Effiong, FRGP
- Session 4: Thriving, Not Just Surviving: The Power of Connection
- Facilitator: Rev. Fr. Fidelis Bature

Impact and Outcomes Harvested

The conference recorded several positive outcomes, including:

- Improved mental health awareness among participants
- Acquisition of practical coping strategies
- Increased engagement and confidence in mental health discussions
- Strengthened visibility and relevance of ICTMH among students.

Compiled by Khalid Musa

RESOURCE & ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Our Bi-monthly Friday
Training on Mental Health will
be held Virtually on the 23rd of
January, 2026.**

Save the Date!

Call for Journal Articles - ICTMH

ICTMH invites submissions of journal articles focused on mental health and cognitive behavioral therapies, especially those offering African-based solutions. A list of suggested topics is available, but you're welcome to propose your own. Writing guidelines, including word counts and tips, are also provided.

Interested? Contact Ese (07068487474) or Michael(08143296589) on WhatsApp. We're happy to support you through the process.

Thank you!



To get feedback or stories? Email us at enquiry@cognitiveng.org

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