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# Community leaders to lead mental health discussions in book read series

By **Hallie Gallinat** - January 3, 2026



Mike Wolanin | The Republic Pastor Felipe Martinez poses for a portrait at First Presbyterian church in downtown Columbus, Ind., Monday, Feb. 12, 2024. First Presbyterian is set to celebrate its 200th anniversary.

It can be difficult and extremely frustrating to try and help someone with mental illness who is adamant that they do not need help. Attempts to do so may even backfire and cause the person to move further away from getting help.

There's a term for that, called anosognosia, which is a neurological condition that prevents awareness of one's mental illness, according to psychologist Dr. Xavier Amador. His book, "I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help," discusses just that and his evidence-based LEAP, or "listen, empathize, agree and partner," method.

Community members, whether they are family members of someone needing help or are just curious to learn more, can talk about the the book together in a series of discussion groups organized by Mental Health Matters and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, of South Central Indiana starting on Jan. 9 and continuing until Feb. 4.

Several community leaders have also been invited to lead discussions on the book. The first session, to be held from from 9 to 10:30 a.m. at Columbus City Hall in the Cal Brand Meeting Room, will have discussions facilitated by First Presbyterian Church pastor Felipe Martinez and Bartholomew Circuit Court Judge Kelly Benjamin.

"I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help" can be purchased at Viewpoint Books or on Amazon. The accompanying book guide can be obtained from Viewpoint Books, the Bartholomew County Public Library or Mental Health Matters. For a full list of dates and locations for book discussion groups, visit [mhmbc.org](http://mhmbc.org).

Amador's LEAP method, as explained in the book, can help build trust with someone even if they refuse to acknowledge their illness, communicate effectively without confrontation or power struggles and recognize the signs of anosognosia, according to Mental Health Matters' website.

Mental Health Matters Action Team Specialist Julie Orben said it provides good examples and tools for how to have a conversation with someone who may be adamant they don't need help and the frustration that can arise from those conversations.

"Dr. Amador, his own brother, he talks about how this whole process changed their relationship in that he went from, 'you're frustrating me, you need to take your medication. If you don't do this, it's going to be bad,' and move from that type of combative conversation to more of having a calm conversation and... a conversation back and forth to acknowledge and show empathy, that you're listening to the person and not being confrontational with them," Orben said.

While the primary focus of the class is on mental health, individuals who struggle with substance issues are welcome to attend as well. Even if they haven't read the book or do not wish to participate in the discussions, community members are still invited to listen in.

"You can still listen, you can still learn something by coming and just listening to the discussion of the individuals that are going to lead the discussion and then there's a study guide that... a couple other individuals within NAMI that developed this study guide that will have different questions that you can go to and individuals can talk about," Orben said.

Martinez said he plans to discuss how the book relates to his work as a pastor and Benjamin as a judge in their respective lines of work and how they can be partners to families experiencing mental health issues. Benjamin said she has already changed the way she frames questions and talks to people who may have mental health issues in the courtroom because of the book.

"I've noticed that if I change the way I ask or how I have my tone with people with mental illness really changes how they respond," Benjamin said.

Because it's a difficult subject, Martinez feels that churches sometimes aren't well equipped to discuss mental health issues, but he said they are trying to de-stigmatize it, even in his own church. They have partnered with NAMI in the past and, in 2025, started a yearlong mental health initiative with workshops, special speakers and support groups.

Martinez believes these discussions are a good opportunity to further de-stigmatize mental health issues. He said he looks forward to having a conversation with Benjamin as well as the community at large.

"I'm so grateful that we as a church have an opportunity to be supportive of the community, and so I invite other churches and other houses of worship to consider ways in which they can collaborate with NAMI and with CRH and Mental Health Matters," Martinez said. "Our members in our community will benefit."

Benjamin hopes the community takes the time and effort to learn more about mental health issues and the LEAP method. She believes it to be a new outlook on how to approach people who may be suffering from a severe mental illness and give them the encouragement they need to seek out help.

"It's really an important and interesting issue that the more you learn about it and the better we understand it, I think the better we can help people," Benjamin said.

