LACDMH LAUNCHES CLERGY ACADEMY
By Karen Zarsadiaz-Ige, Public Information Officer

The official launch of the Clergy Academy took place at White Memorial Medical Center in Los Angeles on Wednesday, January 29, 2014. Nearly 90 people attended this special event.

Created by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH), the Clergy Academy provides faith-based and community leaders with information about various mental health-related topics and social issues. The goal of the Academy is to build healthier communities by promoting mental health awareness, reducing stigma associated with mental illness and increasing access to quality mental health services. Through the Academy, participants can attend free presentations on any topic, such as crisis management, domestic violence, substance use, etc.

At the launch, hosted by UACF and Adventist Health, LACDMH District Chief Ed Vidaurri greeted everyone and served as the Master of Ceremonies. Dr. Edgar Urbina, Director for the White Memorial Medical Center Chaplaincy Services, welcomed the guests.

He was later followed by LACDMH Director Marvin Southard, D.S.W., who explained how the program came about. "The call we listened to for this was from our clients… If we ignore the strength of recovery, we're ignoring what they're requesting," said Dr. Southard. He added that the Clergy Academy was the next step in helping clients and their families. "There are few families that aren't affected by mental illness…We are creating a greater opportunity for cross-fertilization between mental health and the faith community of all sorts… The real reason we are doing this is because the people are crying for it. Our clients are asking for it – the support."

The launch continued with a presentation from the United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF). They gave details about UACF's statewide anti-stigma campaign. And finally, Cindy Claflin, Director of UACF's Leadership Institute, shared an overview of Mental Health First Aid to the audience.