

LOOK up[®]

VOLUME 2
MENTAL HEALTH
TOOLKIT

#breakthestigma



INSPIRED BY

THE **Lutheran**
Foundation

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2020, The Lutheran Foundation released a Congregational Mental Health Toolkit in order to help fulfill our mission to advance Gospel sharing and promote mental wellness that silences the stigma of mental illness. We have received such favorable feedback on the Toolkit that we have created this revised and expanded 2021 edition for congregations. We have included a new sermon, a new Bible study, new bulletin and media announcements, and added posters and a step-by-step strategy for developing a mental health ministry. We have also expanded our list of recommended books, songs, and national mental health organizations.

While these materials were created in recognition and celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month in May, many of the resources within this toolkit can be used at any time during the year as your congregation strives to reach out to those in your midst living with mental illness and their families.

People with lived experience and their families often express the desire for their church to mention mental health with more frequency and in greater depth during worship services and in Bible study groups; doing so would remind them and others that they are not alone in their struggle and that there is help, comfort, and hope in Jesus Christ. To meet this need, this toolkit contains worship and Bible study resources, communication aids, and mental health ministry tools you can use to further your discussion of mental wellness within your congregation.

In addition to this toolkit, faith-based resources are available on LookUpIndiana.org. You can access these materials by clicking on the “Faith Resources” button on the homepage. There, you will find a variety of faith-based resources on the topics of anxiety, depression, substance use, and suicide that you can share with your congregation members. You will also find ministry specific materials, including church worker self-care resources, additional worship and Bible study resources, youth leader resources, and links to recordings of past Look Up Education Series webinars on mental health issues. We continue to add materials to the Look Up Indiana website regularly, so please bookmark the site and visit it often.

We pray that these ready-made materials will be a blessing to you and to your congregation and community as you reach out to them with the love of Christ.

In Christ's Service and Yours,

Deaconess Carole Terkula

MINISTRY ASSOCIATE AT THE LUTHERAN FOUNDATION

BIBLE STUDY PREFACE

Compassion in Action: Exploring Biblical Examples of Mental Health Care

This Bible study was created for use by congregations desiring to address the topic of mental health in their adult or high school youth group Bible study classes. It was written for use during the “May is Mental Health Month” campaign; however, it is our hope that congregations will incorporate more Bible studies on the topic of mental wellness regularly throughout the year.

This study is divided into five sections, with discussion questions at the end of each section. Depending on the size and discussion level of your group, approximately one to two sections could be covered in the span of about one hour. Therefore, this study could be spread out over the course of several Bible study classes in a month. Or, each of the five sections of the Bible study could be used as stand-alone Bible studies.

We encourage you and your congregation to be creative in applying this Bible study. For example, one congregation used the Bible study in last year’s Mental Health Toolkit with their Stephen Ministry group as part of their continuing education during their monthly caregiver meetings. Consider which groups in your church might benefit from going through this study together.

On a final note, caring for those with lived experience is best done through a holistic approach: healing spiritually, mentally, and physically. This Bible study covers some Biblically based practices to help provide a spiritual balm for souls that are hurting. As you care for your congregants, comfort them with God’s Word and refer them to medical and mental health professionals as needed. Additional local mental health resources can also be found on LookUpIndiana.org.

We pray that this study will generate valuable discussion and be a blessing for your congregation as you seek to care for those in your church and community with the love of Christ.

In Christ’s Service and Yours,

Deaconess Carole Terkula

MINISTRY ASSOCIATE AT THE LUTHERAN FOUNDATION

BIBLE STUDY

Compassion in Action: Exploring Biblical Examples of Mental Health Care

By Deaconess Carole Terkula

INTRODUCTION

Current data indicates that 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. will be affected by a mental health concern in a given year.¹ This means that in a congregation of 100 people, approximately 20 people will be impacted by some sort of mental health issue this year. Think about yourself, your own family, and your church family—has anyone suffered from severe stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts? What about the people your church serves in the neighborhood and surrounding community through your outreach initiatives?

God's Word states, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it," (1 Corinthians 12:27) and that we "... should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. . ." (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). We are also instructed by the Lord to "Be kind and compassionate to one another. . ." (Ephesians 4:32).

What does it mean to be compassionate? Merriam Webster defines compassion this way: "Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." When someone in church breaks a hip, receives a cancer diagnosis, or has another physical ailment of some sort, we are often quick to respond with a card, phone call, casserole, or other form of compassionate action. However, when someone in church has a mental health concern, we often don't know how to react.

In this Bible study we will explore some Biblical examples of compassion in action in response to what may appear to be mental distress. We will look at some trying moments in the lives of Moses, Elijah, Job, a paralytic, and Christ Himself and glean some wisdom concerning compassionate action shown them from God directly and from others through whom God was working. We can apply some of the principles learned towards compassionate action for others in our midst who may be suffering.

¹ NAMI, "Mental Health Facts in America." Available online at <https://www.nami.org/nami/media/nami-media/infographics/generalmhfacts.pdf> (accessed July 20, 2020).

MOSES

Read Exodus 18:13-27 and Numbers 11:4-17.

Discussion Questions

1. **A.** In the Exodus 18 passage, did Moses himself realize the potential detrimental long-term effects of his acting as lone judge?
B. Can you think of a time when you were in the thick of things and were unable to see the long-term implication of your actions on your overall well-being? Share that experience as you feel comfortable.

2. **A.** How was Jethro a model of compassion based on the definition from Merriam Webster above?
B. God used Jethro to be a voice of wisdom and discernment in Moses' life by offering advice to prevent accumulated stress from impacting Moses physically, mentally, and emotionally in a negative way which could have also affected Moses' leadership of God's people. Jethro spoke about the issue in a straightforward manner, yet with gentleness and respect. How did Moses respond? List all the verbs in Ex. 18:24-25.
C. Jethro knew what science now affirms: accumulated stress can have a negative impact on our mental health. In her book *Vantage Point: A New View of Rest, Rhythm and the Work of God*, author Brenda Jank discusses how prolonged overexposure to the stress hormone cortisol can impact our overall health:
 - Cortisol damages our brain and does a number on our memory. It sets us up for Alzheimer's.
 - It suppresses our immune system, making us vulnerable to both inconvenient and life-altering illnesses.
 - It plays havoc with our mood, our ability to be patient, self-controlled, and kind.
 - It causes us to gain weight.
 - It sets us up for diabetes, depression, high blood pressure and osteoporosis.
 - It sabotages our sleep.
 - It damages the cells in our body and shortens our life span.²

Where are you feeling cortisol's greatest effect right now in your life? What are some stress relievers you can apply to help alleviate some of this stress?

*Brenda Jank has also founded a non-profit organization called **Run Hard. Rest Well, Inc.** which helps prepare people in high-stress professions to thrive and flourish by applying a transformative blueprint of work, rest, and rhythm to their lives. Please check out her website for more information about how you can relieve stress in your life.*
- D.** Sometimes it just takes one person to speak up and begin a potentially difficult conversation in order to bring positive change, as in the example of Moses and Jethro from Exodus 18. Is there someone who needs to hear your voice of discernment now?

² Brenda Jank, *Vantage Point: A New View of Rest, Rhythm and the Work of God* (Columbia: Run Hard. Rest Well., Inc., 2017), 38.

- 3. A.** How would you describe how Moses is feeling in the passage from Numbers 11:4-17 and his reaction to the stress he is facing?
- B.** Based on the list of the effects of prolonged cortisol exposure on the body due to stress mentioned in question 2 C above, how might the stress Moses experienced as shepherd of God's people for decades in the wilderness be revealing itself in this passage from Numbers?
- 4. A.** To whom does Moses turn for help?
- B.** We too can turn to God in prayer and pour out our raw and honest emotions before Him. He is a big God and can handle the frustrations, hurts, and distress we lay out before Him. How does God respond to Moses' complaint?
- 5.** Sometimes it is difficult to ask for help. Our pride often gets in the way, and we fear appearing needy and weak. Yet, true strength relies upon and rests in God's promises. God often places others in our lives for our help and our good. You don't need to walk alone in whatever trials you are facing. Is there someone that God has placed in your life that you can ask for help in time of need?
- 6.** Read **Galatians 6:2**. God places us in community for our good. What are some practical ways you and your congregation, as the community of Christ, can ease the burden of someone who has a mental health concern in your church or neighborhood?
- 7.** Church work (shepherding God's people) is rewarding yet sometimes stressful work. Please encourage your pastor and other church workers to take good care of their physical, mental, and emotional health. Remind them to check out the church worker self-care resources on [LookUpIndiana.org](https://www.LookUpIndiana.org) (click on the pink self-care tab).

ELIJAH

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18.

Discussion Questions

1. In verse 4, Elijah feels like a failure and has lost hope. What does he pray?
2. God sends an angel to care for Elijah. How does the angel's care show the inter-relationship between body, mind, and spirit in regard to whole person health? In other words, how might Elijah's mental state have been affected by his physical condition?

NOTE: We are fearfully and wonderfully made, (Psalm 139:14) complex creatures, comprised of mind, body, and soul. The health of one of these aspects of our humanity affects the health of the others. Sometimes a physical condition or a physical illness may affect our mental health. That is why it is important to visit your physician or mental health professional if you or a loved one is feeling anxious or depressed for longer than two weeks. Share with your doctor how you are feeling and get a complete physical exam.

3. **A.** According to verses 10 and 14, how did Elijah feel?
- B.** How did God's answer in verses 16 and 18 address Elijah's concern?
- C.** How does a community of faithful believers aid in our mental and emotional well-being? Discuss **2 Corinthians 1:3-5** in light of this question. God has placed you in community within your church family. As you feel comfortable, share a time when your church family was able to provide you some comfort during a time of distress.
- D.** One of Satan's tricks is to convince us that we are all alone in our plight and suffering. When we begin to feel alone, it is good to remember God's promises to the contrary in Scripture. Read and respond to **Deuteronomy 31:8; Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 43:1-5a; Matthew 28:20; John 14:16.**
- E.** What are some practical things you can do to show someone with mental health concerns that you care and that he/she is not alone?
- F.** Stephen Ministry is a wonderful Christian ministry in which lay people are trained to walk alongside those in their congregation who are suffering and in need of some extra care. If your congregation does not offer Stephen Ministry, please check with your pastor about beginning one. Your church can also offer to host other support groups which can help diminish the sense of aloneness by creating a caring community of people experiencing similar circumstances. Such support groups might include: **Grief Share, Celebrate Recovery, The Mom of an Addict, a NAMI Support Group, or Mental Health Grace Alliance Grace Groups.** **Mental Health America's website** has a good list of other available support groups.

JOB

Read Job 2:11-13.

Discussion Questions

- 1. A.** When Job's three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar heard of Job's misfortune, what did they decide to do according to verse 11?
 - B.** Merriam Webster defines sympathy this way: "The act or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another." How did Job's three friends outwardly share in his suffering and grief?
 - C.** In verse 13 Job's friends practice what is commonly called in our time "A ministry of presence." How would you describe "A ministry of presence?"
 - D.** Job's friends' ministry of presence was their greatest gift to Job. The problems began when they began to open their mouths and try to explain to Job their understanding of the cause of his suffering. Read **Job 42: 7-9**. What was God's judgment on the explanations they offered Job? What did Job have to do on their behalf?
- 2. A.** Sometimes the greatest comfort we can give to someone in distress is non-verbal: a hug, holding a hand, weeping with that person, sitting with them, etc. We don't have to have all the answers. It's okay to say, "I don't understand why this is happening to you. This stinks. I want to let you know I am here for you no matter what." Praying out loud with the other person can also be a powerful and meaningful gift.
 - B.** As you feel comfortable share a time when someone offered you the "ministry of presence" and the impact that had on you. Can you think of someone with mental health concerns with whom you can give the gift of the ministry of presence?
- 3.** Take a moment and write out one or two Bible passages that bring you comfort that you could share with someone who is suffering. Share as a group. As others share, jot down the Bible passages so that you have a list of Scripture from which you can draw to give comfort and hope to another in time of need.

JESUS' MOTHER AND HIS SIBLINGS

Read Mark 3:20-34. (See also Mark 6:3 to learn more about Jesus' family.)

NOTE: Especially early in Jesus' ministry, his family did not fully understand Jesus' Messianic role or work. Jesus did not suffer from mental illness; nevertheless, we can still glean some insight from these passages into how we can show care and concern for those in our midst who have mental health concerns.

Discussion Questions

1. Why were Mary and Jesus' family concerned about him?

2. **A.** Note Mary's wisdom in not trying to stage an intervention on her own. She gathers other family members to garner support. Is there someone in your church family with a mental health need that could use the support and encouragement of the family of Christ at this time? How might you express your love and care for them?
- B.** Are you familiar with the mental health resources in your area? If your church does not have a list of local mental health resources, you might consider creating a binder of such materials for ease of access for those seeking community assistance. Pathways 2 Promise's *Mental Health Ministry: A Toolkit for Faith Communities* has a useful template for creating a list of community helps on p. 34. LookUpIndiana.org also has a local provider search button on the homepage where you can search for local mental health assistance using your zip code.

3. Mary and Jesus' siblings had traveled over 30 miles from their home in Nazareth to the home in Capernaum where Jesus was teaching to speak with him. They probably traveled on foot, which would have been about at least a two-day long journey one way. One could say they went "the extra mile" for Jesus. Indeed, the path of mental illness can be long and difficult. How might you and your church family "go the extra mile" for someone in your congregation on their mental health journey?

4. **A.** Mary was not dissuaded from showing her love and care for Jesus even after He had dismissed his family's concern in the Mark 3 passage above. In fact, Mary was present for Jesus in the time of His greatest suffering. Read and discuss **John 19:25-27**.
- B.** Sometimes a person with mental health issues will not readily accept help and may push us away. How are we to react? Read and discuss **Proverbs 17:17 and Ecclesiastes 4:10-12**. How might you and your church family prepare to care for a congregation member as they travel down the road of continued difficulty in their mental health journey? How could an established mental health ministry in your congregation help in your efforts toward committed care?

THE PARALYTIC

Read Mark 2:1-12.

Discussion Questions

1. Note in the passage from Mark above that there were barriers that prevented the paralyzed man from entering the home to experience the presence of Jesus. Yet the persistence of the man's friends in finding a creative way to get him in front of Jesus to hear the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ met the man's spiritual need and also led to his physical, emotional and mental healing.

"Whether we realize it or not, our expectations at church for social interactions and conduct, when combined with the physical properties and demands of our ministry environments, represent significant barriers to church involvement for people with common mental health conditions and their families."³

- A. Our primary responsibility as the Church is to bring people in to hear God's Word and receive His Sacraments in faith. Consider some possible barriers within your church that prevent those with mental health conditions and their families from participating in worship and other church activities. Think about and discuss the following:

- Stigma about mental illness
- Church design/floorplan/atmosphere (lighting, volume level, traffic flow, open space, seating, etc. It may help to consider the effect these things have on those with ADD/ADHD, anxiety, PTSD, etc. Dr. Grcevich's book *Mental Health and the Church* contains much practical advice in lifting these barriers—see footnote 3 below.)

- B. One way to help eliminate the barrier of stigma in your faith community is by holding educational workshops and trainings on the topic of mental health and wellness. The more we openly talk about mental health and try to better understand mental health conditions, the better we can express the love and care of Christ with our neighbors. There are several educational workshops your congregation can hold on the topic of mental health. [NAMI FaithNet](#) and [Mental Health America](#) are two organizations that can provide workshops on a variety of topics for your congregation. Many local Christian counseling agencies are also willing to have one of their counselors speak on a topic of interest at your church. What are some mental health topics about which you would like more information?

- C. The Congregational Mental and Behavioral Health Assessment is designed to help congregations determine what the mental health needs of their members are in order to narrow the focus of their mental health ministry initiatives. Ask your pastor and church leaders about conducting this brief survey in your church. (The Congregational Mental and Behavioral Health Assessment will be provided at a later date.)

NOTE: Many of the concepts for caring for people experiencing mental distress mentioned in this Bible study are also fleshed out in the [Pathways to Promise Companionship Movement](#). The Companionship Movement develops the capacity of congregations and communities to respond to a person's suffering or distress. Individuals learn how to form authentic relationships built on mutuality which provide a sense of community that allows for connections with resources toward healing, recovery and wellness. If your congregation would like more information about starting a Companionship ministry in your congregation, please contact Deaconess Carole Terkula at carole@thelutheranfoundation.org.

³ Stephen Grcevich, *Mental Health and The Church: A Ministry Handbook for Including Children and Adults with ADHD, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Other Common Mental Health Conditions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 49.

CONCLUSION

Due to living in a broken, sinful world since mankind's fall in the Garden of Eden, we suffer all sorts of physical, mental, and spiritual ailments in our earthly lifetime. God has shown His ultimate compassion toward us by sending His Son Jesus Christ to bear our sin on the cross, suffer, die, and rise again from the grave. Jesus has conquered sin and death on our behalf so that through faith in Him as our Savior we have eternal life with Him.

"He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Matthew 8:17). This includes the disease of sin and all diseases. Indeed, Christ has borne our sin and our physical and mental ailments so that when we are resurrected on the last day, we will be wholly healed and restored in mind, body, and soul. We look forward to that day with great anticipation! While we wait, may the Lord grant us the compassion to reach out with the love and care of Christ, especially to those with mental health conditions and their families who may be suffering alone in silence.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious Father, your love and compassion know no bounds. Thank you for sending Jesus to heal us from the disease of sin. We also give you thanks for the care and healing you provide for us on our earthly journey through doctors, counselors, pastors, medicine, and the like. Forgive us for not always reaching out to others with the love and care of Christ. Help us to extend your love and compassion to all, especially those living with mental health conditions and their families. We look forward to the day when we will enjoy full mental, physical, and spiritual restoration in heaven. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

CLOSING NOTE: The Lutheran Foundation invests in Lutheran and community organizations to advance Gospel sharing and promote mental wellness that silences the stigma of mental illness. To help meet this vision we have accumulated a variety of faith-based mental health resources at LookUpIndiana.org, including "[Compassion in Action: A Guide for Faith Communities Serving People Experiencing Mental Illness and Their Caregivers](#)" by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Partnership Center. This guidebook provides a thorough overview of serving those in your congregation affected by mental illness. To learn more about beginning a mental health ministry in your congregation or further developing an existing mental health initiative in your church, please contact Rev. Dennis Goff at dennis@thelutheranfoundation.org or Dcs. Carole Terkula at carole@thelutheranfoundation.org.

BOOK CLUB

Suggested Readings on the Topic of Mental Health

Consider forming a book club in your congregation where you could read and discuss the following:

And She Was a Christian: Why Do Believers Commit Suicide?

By Peter Preus, August 2011

Suicide has been a historically difficult and taboo topic for the church. Christians can struggle to understand it. This is especially true when it is a fellow believer who takes his or her own life. *And She Was a Christian* provides answers straight from God's Word, with a strong emphasis on the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks: An 8-week Bible Study for Small Groups in Trauma-Informed Ministry and Compassionate Outreach to Individuals with Adversity in Childhood

By Chris Haughee, 2019

Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks is a study on the intersections between the science of adversity in childhood (ACEs), trauma, and ministry. Suitable for individuals exploring how their faith and the science of brain development, toxic stress, and spiritual formation are connected, this study is best explored by small groups that want to begin trauma-informed ministry interventions and outreach within their faith communities.

Darkness is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness

By Kathryn Greene-McCreight, 2015

Where is God in the suffering of a mentally ill person? What happens to the soul when the mind is ill? How are Christians to respond to mental illness? In this brave and compassionate book, theologian and priest Kathryn Greene-McCreight confronts these difficult questions raised by her own mental illness—bipolar disorder. With brutal honesty, she tackles often-avoided topics such as suicide, mental hospitals, and electroconvulsive therapy. Greene-McCreight offers the reader everything from poignant and raw glimpses into the mind of a mentally ill person to practical and forthright advice for their friends, family, and clergy.

Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness

By Matthew S. Stanford, 2017

Matthew S. Stanford has seen far too many mentally ill brothers and sisters damaged by well-meaning believers who respond to them out of fear or misinformation rather than grace. *Grace for the Afflicted* is written to educate Christians about mental illness from both biblical and scientific perspectives. Stanford presents insights into our physical and spiritual nature and discusses the appropriate role of psychology and psychiatry in the life of the believer. Describing common mental disorders, Stanford probes what science says and what the Bible says about each illness.

[Click here for a free downloadable discussion guide that goes with *Grace for the Afflicted*.](#)

How to Live in Fear: Mastering the Art of Freaking Out

By Lance Hahn, 2016

In *How to Live in Fear*, Lance Hahn tackles the pervasive problem of fear and panic head-on by inviting readers into his world. In this genuine and practical book, he invites readers into the life of a pastor living with anxiety disorder. Through humorous personal stories—like losing it on an airplane or collapsing onstage as he is about to preach—Lance will win over readers with his transparency. He will also share the remedies that have helped him recover and overcome throughout the years.

Mental Health and the Church: A Ministry Handbook for Including Children and Adults with ADHD, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Other Common Mental Health Conditions

By Stephen Grcevich, 2018

In *Mental Health and the Church: A Ministry Handbook for Including Children and Adults with ADHD, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Other Common Mental Health Conditions*, Dr. Stephen Grcevich presents a simple and flexible model for mental health inclusion ministry for implementation by churches of all sizes, denominations, and organizational styles. The model is based upon recognition of seven barriers to church attendance and assimilation resulting from mental illness: stigma, anxiety, self-control, differences in social communication, sensory processing, social isolation, and past experiences of church. Seven broad inclusion strategies are presented for helping persons of all ages with common mental health conditions and their families to fully participate in all the ministries offered by the local church. The book is also designed to be a useful resource for parents, grandparents and spouses interested in promoting the spiritual growth of loved ones with mental illness.

Preaching Hope in the Darkness: Help for Pastors in Addressing Suicide from the Pulpit

By Scott M. Gibson and Karen E. Mason, 2020

Pastors face many challenges. Suicide in a congregation is among the most heart-rending and intimidating. However, the preacher has a unique capacity to engender gospel hope for preparing the congregation and comforting the bereaved. To do so, preachers need help understanding the challenges and opportunities presented by addressing suicide from the pulpit.

In *Preaching Hope in Darkness*, two practitioners in fields that do not typically interact--homiletics (Scott M. Gibson) and psychology (Karen Mason)--work together to support the preacher in this difficult task. Gibson and Mason offer wise advice on a range of topics such as suicide prevention, post-crisis care, and funeral sermon preparation. With an appendix of sample sermons and a sample funeral liturgy, *Preaching Hope in Darkness* is an essential go-to guide for this difficult topic.

Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains, and Pastoral Counselors

By Karen E. Mason, 2014

What is the church's role in suicide prevention? While we tend to view the work of suicide prevention as the task of professional therapists and doctors, the church can also play a vital role. Studies show that religious faith is an important factor reducing the risk of suicide. Yet many pastors, chaplains and pastoral counselors feel overwhelmed and unprepared to prevent suicides. In this practical handbook, psychologist Karen Mason equips ministry professionals to work with suicidal individuals. Integrating theology and psychology, she shows how pastoral caregivers can be agents of hope, teaching the significance of life, monitoring those at risk and intervening when they need help. Because church leaders are often present in people's lives in seasons of trouble and times of crisis, they can provide comfort in the midst of suffering and offer guidance for the future. When our church members struggle in the darkness, the darkness need not overcome them. Discover how you and your church can be proactive in caring for those at risk of self-harm.

Souls in the Hands of a Tender God: Stories of the Search for Home and Healing on the Streets

By Craig Rennebohm, 2009

Craig Rennebohm shares the evocative stories of those he has encountered on the street who desperately need psychiatric, psychological, and spiritual support. We meet people who, abandoned and marginalized by their community, need care and treatment to find their way back to a life of stability and meaning. Their stories become parables that explore mental illness and the spiritual heart of care and recovery, helping us understand what it means to be human, on a pilgrimage together toward wholeness.

Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission

By Amy Simpson, 2013

In *Troubled Minds*, Amy Simpson, whose family knows the trauma and bewilderment of mental illness, reminds us that people with mental illness are our neighbors and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and she shows us the path to loving them well and becoming a church that loves God with whole hearts and whole souls, with the strength we have and with minds that are whole as well as minds that are troubled.

[Click here for a free discussion guide available online that goes along with *Troubled Minds*.](#)

[Click here for a 6 session Bible study based on *Troubled Minds*; this Bible study is available through Christianity Today for a fee.](#)

NOTE: *These synopses taken from the book descriptions on Amazon.com.*



CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SONGS

22 Contemporary Christian Songs of Hope and Comfort

"Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)"
by Chris Tomlin

"By Your Side" by Tenth Avenue North

"Confidence" by Sanctus Real

"Cry Out to Jesus" by Third Day

"Eye of the Storm" by Ryan Stevenson

"Flawless" by Mercy Me

"Greater" by Mercy Me

"Hello, My Name Is" by Matthew West

"In Christ Alone" by Kristian Stanfill

"Nobody" by Casting Crowns

"Out of the Dark" by Mandisa

LISTEN to how Mandisa's own experience with depression led to her writing this song.

"Overcomer" by Mandisa

"Praise You in This Storm" by Casting Crowns

"Remind Me Who I Am" by Jason Gray

"Rescue" by Lauren Daigle

"Rise" by Danny Gokey

LISTEN to Danny's story of how God provided hope in the midst of his depression.

"The Best News Ever" by Mercy Me

"Voice of Truth" by Casting Crowns

"Who You Say I am" by Hillsong Worship

"Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)"
by Chris Tomlin

"You Say" by Lauren Daigle

"Your Love Defends Me" by Matt Maher



HYMNS

10 Hymns of Hope and Comfort

"I Trust, O Lord, Your Holy Name"
(Lutheran Service Book {LSB}734)

"In God, My Faithful God"
(LSB 745)

"Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me"
(LSB 756)

"Entrust Your Days and Burdens"
(LSB 754)

"When Peace, Like a River"
(LSB 763)

"A Mighty Fortress"
(LSB 656)

"O God, Forsake Me Not"
(LSB 731)

"What God Ordains is Always Good"
(LSB 760)

"Abide With Me"
(LSB 878)

"Jesus, Priceless Treasure"
(LSB 743)

Some Practical Ways to Implement These Hymns:

- Introduce one of these hymns in your Sunday worship service.
- Sing one of the hymns (or a few stanzas of the hymn) as the opening or closing prayer for your adult Sunday School class.
- Use one of the hymns as a basis for one of your adult or high school youth group Bible studies.
- Include one stanza of one of the hymns in a thinking-of-you card that you send to someone who could use some extra encouragement.
- Text one stanza of one of the hymns to someone you know who needs a little extra encouragement.
- Find a YouTube version of one of the hymns and share it on your Facebook page as a way to encourage and uplift others.



STIGMA BUSTERS

Mental Illness Stigma Busters for Bulletin and Media Announcements

Education and open communication about mental health are the first step toward helping cure the stigma associated with mental illness. We invite you to use these mental illness stigma busters in your bulletins, newsletters, email announcements, social media posts, etc. during the month of May to help cure stigma.

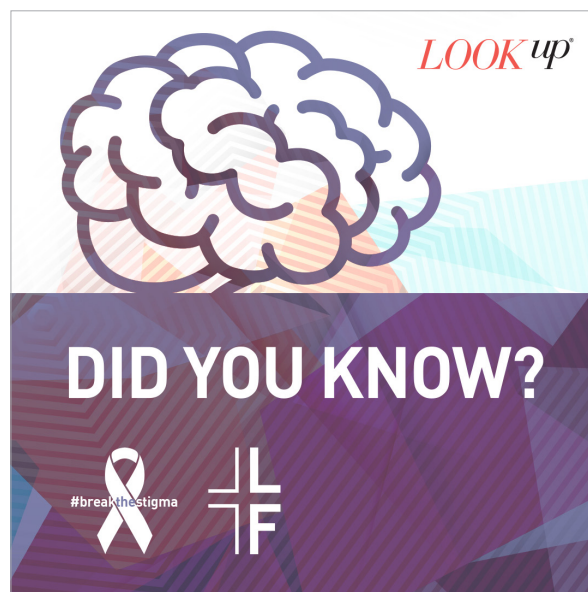
WEEK 1

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Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability in the United States.

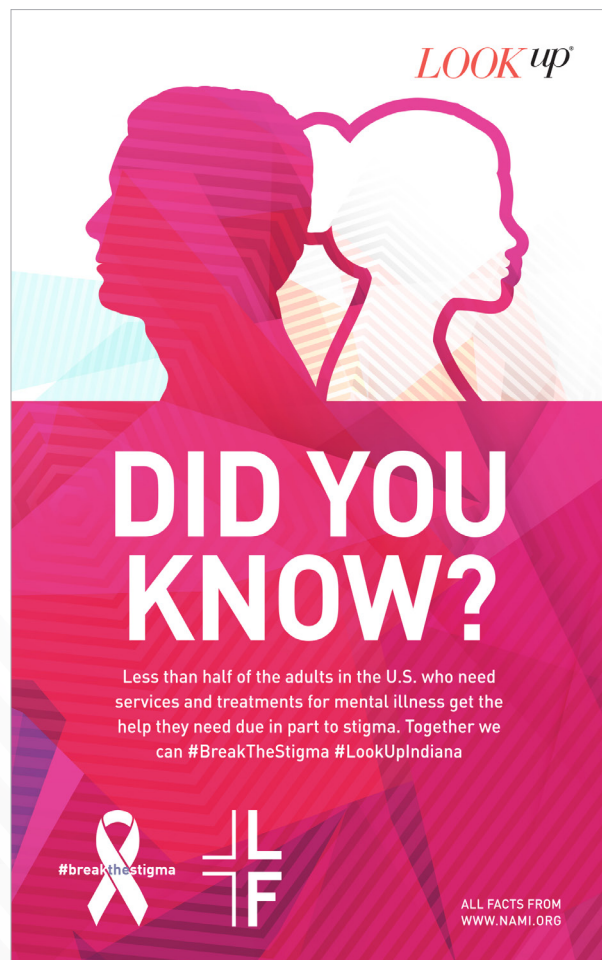
Together we can #BreakTheStigma #LookUp

All facts from www.nami.org

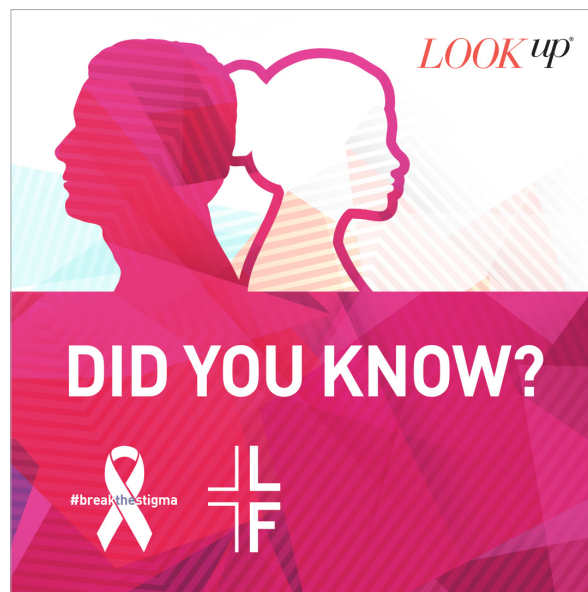
WEEK 2

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Less than half of the adults in the U.S. who need services and treatments for mental illness get the help they need due in part to stigma.

Together we can #BreakTheStigma #LookUp

All facts from www.nami.org

WEEK 3

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The average delay between the onset of mental illness symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years due in part to stigma.

Together we can #BreakTheStigma #LookUp

All facts from www.nami.org

WEEK 4

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Suicide is the second leading cause of death in youth ages 15-24, and the tenth leading cause of death for all Americans.

Together we can #BreakTheStigma #LookUp

All facts from www.nami.org

WEEK 5

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1 in 5 people in your church are living with a mental health condition that they often don't feel comfortable talking about in church due in part to stigma.

Together we can #BreakTheStigma #LookUp

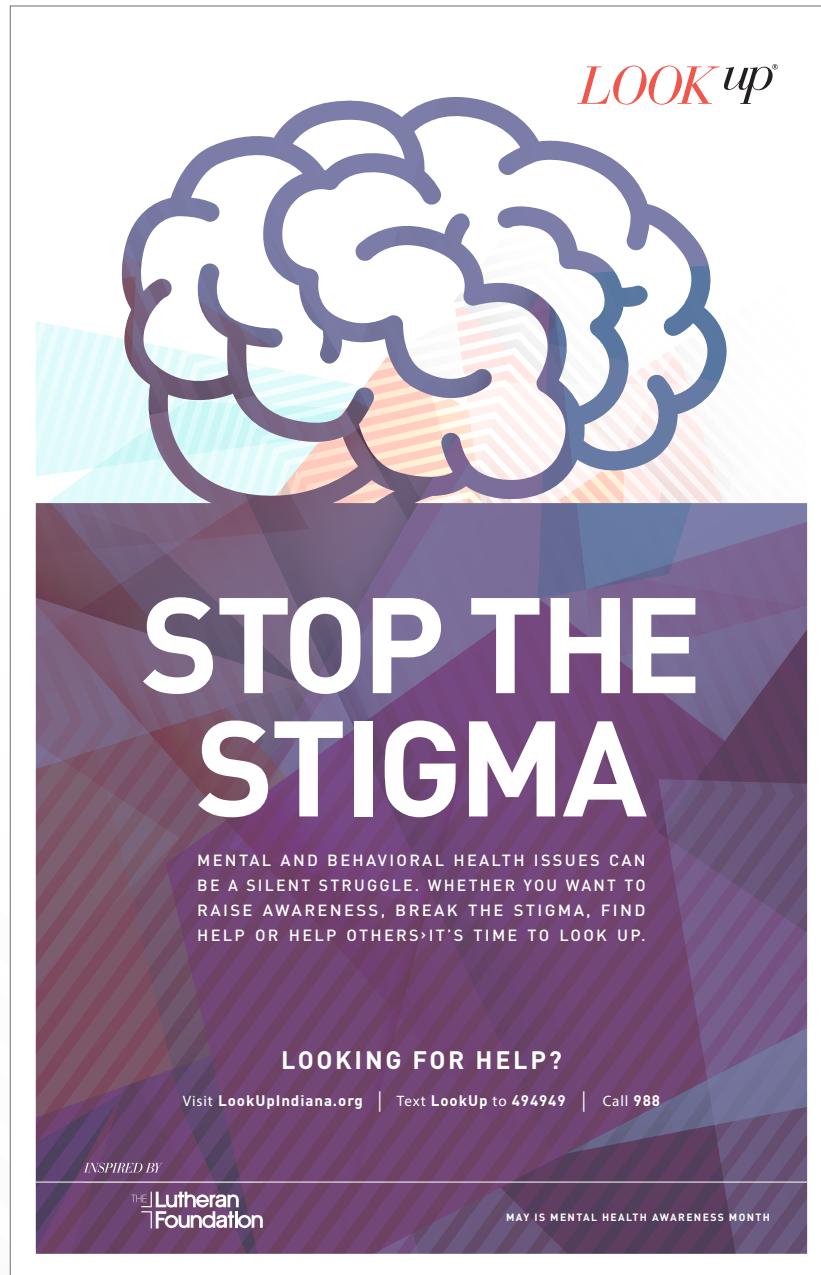
All facts from www.nami.org

POSTERS

Posters for Mental Health Awareness

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Poster 11" x 17"



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Poster 11" x 17"



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Poster 11" x 17"



PRAYERS

Prayers For Those Affected By Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

The following prayers have been adapted from *Your Life Matters!*, an initiative of the Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention as supplied on the mentalhealthministries.net website. Used with permission.

Prayer 1

God, we ask you to comfort and heal all among us who experience various mental health concerns, whether they be depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, dementia, or others. Lord, we know that at times their suffering is great, and their isolation can seem unbearable. May they experience the love and support from their family here at (Name of Faith Community) that is the hallmark of your Kingdom as we reach out to them in love. Also, we ask you to show your hand in helping them experience the effective treatment they need from doctors and caregivers. There are others among us who carry the weight of an addiction. Some involve alcohol or prescription drugs, some are other addictions. You know them all, Lord. We rejoice that some persons are in recovery, and we ask for your continued grace and mercy for their journey. For those who are still in the powerful grip of their illness, we pray that your good news would, as the prophet Isaiah affirmed and Jesus proclaimed, “bind up the broken hearted and proclaim freedom to the captives.” And Lord, we pray for those who care for and love our brothers and sisters who daily face the many challenges of living with mental illness and substance abuse, in any of the many ways those conditions manifest themselves. Their work can be exhausting. Raise up in us a caring community to help them in their times of need. Amen.

Prayer 2

God of love, today as we celebrate Mental Health Sunday, stir in us deep compassion for people living with brain disorders and their families. Raise our awareness of how we can create a supportive and safe spiritual community for people who feel isolated, shunned and ashamed. Inspire us to reach out in love as a sign of your radical hospitality and grace. Encourage us to receive the gifts that are given by all, including those who are living with mental health concerns. Amen.

Prayer 3

Lord, we pray for people who live with untreated mental illness and who are unable to find help and cannot afford medical care. We pray for an end to the stigma of mental illness. We pray for families torn apart by mental health diseases. We pray for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. We pray for mental health caregivers, for scientific researchers, and for professionals who seek to bring compassion, treatment and healing to those who suffer from brain diseases. We pray for children, teens, and young adults learning how to live with newly diagnosed brain diseases. We pray for people burdened by labels and stereotypes. Lord, as the mysteries of the human brain unfold, we remain in awe of the intricate ways in which we are created in your image. May we be reflections of your love in this world. Amen.

Prayer 4

O God, we place before you the illnesses of major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar and anxiety disorders, eating and post-traumatic stress disorders, and alcoholism and drug addiction. Be with all who live with these conditions and their loved ones, reassuring them that You are their Savior, sustainer, and guide. Be the light in our dark times; be the love in the places of our isolation; be the truth when our fears bring falsehood; and be the grace that overcomes our shame. Enable all to speak and live with honesty and courage, resting in Your grace which is sufficient for every need. Through Jesus Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Prayer 5

Let us pray to the Father of Mercies: Father, we pray for the unity and mission of the holy Church of God; that it may welcome and serve all who live with a mental illness. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Guide us, the citizens and leaders of this land, this state and this city ... that we may unite to provide for and protect the poor, the homeless and all who suffer in mind, body and spirit. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Forgive us when we knowingly or unwittingly ridicule, look in disgust, neglect or discriminate against the mentally ill. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Comfort and relieve all who are troubled in mind and spirit. Bring them hope, peace and the consolation of a loving community. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Grant patience and courage to the families and friends of those who are ill. Increase their perseverance as they face challenges to recovery for their loved one. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Protect and defend people living with mental illness from exploitation, addictions and abuse. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Walk with the homeless and missing persons, those who are destitute and have no one to care. Forgive us for our indifference. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We commend to your mercy and defense all who are contemplating suicide today, right now. Bring someone or something to intervene. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

For the families who have lost a loved one to mental illness, comfort them as they trust in your abounding mercy and grace. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Guide those who do research for the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses; uphold them with your compassion and diligence. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

For those who are in recovery and for treatments that enable them to return to full and rewarding lives, we give you thanks. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Giver of life and health, we trust that in your time and way, you will dispel all darkness with your light, all confusion with your order, all fear with your peace. Through Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer 6

For persons with a mental illness, and their families to find effective treatment for their illness and understanding and acceptance from others, **we pray to the Lord.**

For families who strive to understand and help their loved ones with mental illness, **we pray to the Lord.**

For people who live on the streets without homes or hope, **we pray to the Lord.**

For people with mental illness who are confined in jails and prisons, we pray to the Lord. In thanksgiving for the compassion and dedication of mental health professionals and those providing care, **we pray to the Lord.**

For our elected officials to come to an understanding of the need for increased funding for mental health care, **we pray to the Lord.**

That the darkness of stigma, labels, exclusion and marginalization might be dispelled by the light of greater understanding, acceptance and respect for the dignity of every person, **we pray to the Lord.**

For each of us to reach out with support as we form a caring community, **we pray to the Lord. Amen.**

(This prayer prepared and distributed by the NCPD Council on Mental Illness, 2009. www.ncpd.org. It may be reprinted provided you credit this source.)

Prayer 7

Leader: God of love, we celebrate that today you are still speaking words of acceptance, wholeness, and mercy for all your differently abled people.

People: **As a congregation, we are glad to lift up our voices and our spirits to break the silence that often happens when we are confronted with mental illness.**

Leader: As the body of Christ, we name people who so often go unnamed among us – all who live with a mental illness such as major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizophrenia and the like.

People: **We pray for mental health caregivers, for scientific researchers, and for caring professionals who bring compassion, treatment and healing to all who suffer from brain diseases.**

Leader: We pray for an end to the stigma of mental illness.

People: **We pray for all who live with untreated mental illness and who are unable to find help and cannot afford medical care.**

Leader: We pray for people burdened by labels and stereotypes.

People: **We pray for families torn apart by mental health illnesses, and for families that hold on to one another during difficult times of illness.**

Leader: We pray for all who have lost a loved one who died by suicide.

People: **We give you thanks for this church and the ways we seek to live out Jesus' commandment to love You, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.**

Leader: We stand in awe of the mysteries of the human brain and the intricate ways in which we are created in your image.

People: **May we all be reflections of Your love to each person you bring into our lives, through Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer 8

NOTE TO WORSHIP LEADER BEFORE WORSHIP: *One way to illustrate that one in five people live with a mental health concern, is to put a colored sticker (green is the preferred color of sticker) on every fifth worship bulletin or information sheet handed out to people as they enter worship. As the worship leader begins to speak the words below, reference can be made to bulletins with a sticker on them.*

Leader: If you have a colored sticker on your bulletin, I invite you to stand, as you represent the one in five people in America who live with a mental or behavioral health illness, whether that is a severe, moderate or mild illness. We acknowledge today that we are often uninformed about these issues and how they impact people among us and their families.

People: (THOSE WHO ARE SEATED) At times, because of our lack of knowledge and understanding, we find ourselves separated from our sisters and brothers who live with serious mental illness and substance abuse, as well as their families who live this journey along with them.

People: (THOSE WHO ARE STANDING) We seek God's wisdom to help us all dispel ignorance and misinformation about mental and behavioral health illnesses such as major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, panic disorder, any form of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the like.

Leader: We pray for troubled minds and hearts, broken lives and relationships. Almighty God, we pray that you would provide Your people with hope, peace and opportunities to participate in a loving community.

People: (THOSE WHO ARE SEATED) We pray that the cloud of stigma, labels, exclusion and marginalization might disappear from our language and behavior towards all who are touched by mental and behavioral health concerns as well as all with whom we live and work and go to school with as we are called to be Christ to all our neighbors.

People: (THOSE WHO ARE STANDING) We pray that through our words and actions we may convey hope to individuals living with mental and behavioral health concerns that they may receive better treatment, steadier recovery, and greater opportunities to work and serve with the gifts God has given to them. We pray also for the families of people living with serious mental health issues who often feel overwhelmed and isolated; sustain them in this journey as well. As they provide care and compassion for their loved ones, may others provide care and compassion to them also.

Leader: We offer our gratitude for compassionate, dedicated caregivers and mental health professionals, for new discoveries in brain research, for better medications, and for the body of Christ to provide companionship and understanding for those who daily live with mental and behavioral health concerns, as we walk with one another side by side on life's journey.

People: (ALL WHO ARE SITTING AND STANDING) O God, we seek the power of Your Spirit, that we may live in fuller union with You and all living with mental and behavioral health concerns. Grant that we may gain courage to love and understand each other, as you love and understand us. We offer this prayer in the name of the Risen Christ who makes all things new. Amen.

Prayer 9

by Amy Simpson

Loving God, I pray for all whose brains have been hurt by disease, injury, stress, trauma, and other factors of human life in a hard world. I pray for all who love them and want to help. I pray for your comfort in their grief, hope amid loss, and the balm of community with people who understand.

For people with mental illness—may they find hope in you and feel your longing for them.

For parents of children with mental illness—may they know the limits of their power both to cause and to cure.

For children of parents with mental illness—may they know you as loving parent and find places where they can grow up in safety, no matter how old they are.

For friends of suffering people—may they resist the temptation to try to “fix” their friends and recognize the simple power of their loving presence.

For spiritual leaders—may they deny both helplessness and overconfidence, courageously serving as first responders and faithful shepherds.

For people who need treatment and don’t receive it—may they recognize their need, believe life can be better, and find people who can help.

For those burdened by shame and stigma—may they walk into the light and find compassionate people.

Lord, I pray for light in the darkness. I pray that people with vulnerable minds will find hope and help among followers of Christ who will love them and point them toward what they need while letting them live with that need. I pray for acceptance and grace—the same kind of grace you offer so freely to all. I pray that many churches will embrace the opportunity for messy and sometimes thankless ministry among the marginalized, in the name of the one whose love knows no margins. Amen.

Prayer 10

Benediction

May the God of compassion, who says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” encourage you.

May the God of mercy and grace, who says, “Take heart, son; Your sins are forgiven,” comfort you.

May the God of love, who says, “You are precious and honored in my sight, embrace you this day and every day. Amen.

(This benediction adapted from the UCC Mental Health Network mhn-ucc.org. Used with permission.)

SCRIPTURE

SCRIPTURE FOR ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. **Numbers 6:24-27***

*The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. **Deuteronomy 31:8***

*For the sake of his great name, the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. **1 Samuel 12:22***

*But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the Lord I cry aloud, and He answers me from his holy hill. **Psalms 3:3-4***

*I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. **Psalms 18:1-2***

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **Psalms 23:4***

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. **Psalms 46:1***

*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone, my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people, pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. **Psalms 62:5-8***

*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. **Psalms 63:7-8***

*Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the pit enclose its mouth over me. Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly for I am in trouble. **Psalms 69:14-17***

*Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay. **Psalms 70:5***

*I lift my eyes unto the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. **Psalms 121***

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. **Isaiah 40:20**

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. **Isaiah 41:10**

But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. **Isaiah 43:1-2**

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. **Jeremiah 29:11**

For nothing is impossible with God. **Luke 1:37**

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one. **John 10:27-30**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid. **John 14:27**

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Romans 8:38-39**

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. **Romans 15:4**

May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Romans 15:13**

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. **2 Corinthians 12:9**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:6-7**

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3-5

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

Some Practical Ways to Implement These Scripture Verses

- Include one of the verses in a “Thinking of You” or “We’ve missed seeing you” card and send it to someone you know who could benefit from some encouragement.
- Text a verse to someone you know who needs to be remembered and uplifted to let them know you are thinking about them and care about them.
- Meditate on one verse as a basis for your daily devotion.
- Print out this list and distribute it as a resource for your church’s Stephen Ministry Team, Christ Care or small groups ministries, Parish Nurses, Nursing Home Visitation Team, Food/Clothing Pantry Volunteers, Church Café Ministry Team, Evangelism Canvassing Team, Comfort Dog Ministry Team, LERT (emergency response team), or other volunteers who come into contact with people who may be in distress or need extra encouragement.
- Put one verse per week/month on your church’s/school’s website homepage or Facebook page.
- Select a few verses and use them for discussion in one of your Bible study groups.
- Use some of the shorter verses as memory verses for Sunday School kids.
- Have the Sunday School kids use them on handmade bookmarks or other artwork that can be given to your shut-ins or those in the hospital.
- Print out some of the verses and attach them to the bags/boxes of food you distribute through your food pantry.
- Print out some of the verses and attach them to the quilts, baby blankets, other knit items or handicrafts that your LWML/women’s group creates for distribution.
- Print out some of the verses and affix them to the coffee cups used in your church’s coffee fellowship/ ministry.
- Use them on your church’s bulletin cover(s).
- Use them on your church sign.

The possibilities for sharing these Bible verses are only as limited as your imagination!

SERMON

“Being Well” John 5:1-15

By Rev. Dr. Dennis Goff

DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAMS AT THE LUTHERAN FOUNDATION

What if the diagnosis was coronavirus? We’ve recently learned that after more than a year of this pandemic, over half a million people have now died from COVID-19 in the United States alone. While we are thankful for the availability of a vaccine, the impact of this pandemic will affect nearly every aspect of our lives for years to come.

Or, what if the diagnosis was cancer? Last year alone, there were nearly 2 million new cases of cancer in the United States. Far too many of us have either experienced this firsthand or known someone close to us who has had to face this dreaded diagnosis.

Or, what if the issue was heart disease? Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. One out of every 13 people will experience some sort of coronary artery trouble in their lifetime.

But what if, the issue was mental illness? Do you realize that one in five adults in America, 20%, live with a mental illness? However, 60% of adults and 50% of youth living with a mental illness do not receive any form of regular treatment.

Actually, there are more people living with a mental illness than there are people living with coronavirus, cancer or heart disease combined. But if 50 or 60 percent of people living with coronavirus or cancer or heart disease didn’t receive treatment, or didn’t talk about their physical ailment, wouldn’t we consider that unacceptable? We would likely insist something must be done for more people to receive care.

Here’s where I’m going – God has created each one of us with body, mind, and spirit . . . and so unquestionably God is interested in our well-being – spiritually, physically, and mentally. Today’s gospel reading illustrates this point.

In John 5 we read where Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the annual Jewish festivals. While in Jerusalem, He goes to the temple area and enters through the sheep gate and comes to a pool called Bethesda. Now that pool was divided into two sections. Half of the pool was used to wash the sheep to be used in temple sacrifice. But the other half of the pool was used by people.

However, that part of the water people used wasn’t just any ordinary pool of water. Somewhat mysteriously, every once in a while that water would begin to stir. And when it stirred, people believed the water had healing qualities to it, but only momentarily.

The reason for the movement in the water was because of a natural spring underneath. Nevertheless, the common belief among the people was that when the water stirred, it was because an angel from heaven was dipping its wing into the water causing the water to move. And because of that, it was believed that the first person in the water, would be healed of whatever infirmity they had.

Believing the water had that kind of healing quality, it's not surprising that John points out here that there were a lot of people gathered around that body of water. There were people there disabled in one way or another. There were people blind who could not see. There were people there paralyzed or who had other mobility limitations. Overall, there were a lot of people with a lot of needs gathered around the that body of water at Bethesda.

So, picture if you will, what the scene must have looked like around that body of water most days. As the water started to stir, imagine the pushing and shoving that likely happened as each ailing person desperately tried to be the first one in the water. It's unlikely that people politely and patiently helped each other in or waited their turn. No, more than likely, it was every man for himself.

One day, Jesus comes to the pool and He sees a man lying there who has been coming there for 38 years. For 38 years! That's 13,879 days. Day in and day out he came there. He waited. He hoped. He asked for help. But so far nothing. And so, he was still there, 38 years later.

While we don't know much about this man's overall condition, he apparently wasn't able to move much on his own, at least not very easily. In fact, when Jesus asked him the question, "Do you want to get well?" the only thing he says in response was there was no one there to help him into the water. But nevertheless, Jesus simply says to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." And he does!

Now with that act of divine healing, we have an incredible illustration of Jesus' concern for the man's physical well-being. But that's not Jesus' only concern.

A little while later, Jesus sees this same man in the temple. We don't know why the man was in the temple. Maybe he simply came there to offer thanksgiving for the divine healing he received after all those years. Whatever the reason the man was in the temple, Jesus says to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Now what did Jesus mean by that?

Well, to understand what Jesus meant when He said this, it's important to first acknowledge what Jesus did NOT mean. Jesus did NOT mean that the man's physical condition before he was healed was because of a certain sin in his life which was the reason for his affliction. No, the man's infirmity was not some kind of divine punishment for something he did wrong. That's not what Jesus was saying to him.

But what Jesus was saying is that while living with a physical ailment for 38 years may have been difficult enough, what would be even worse is to have no hope of salvation in your life. What would be worse is to not know the unconditional love God has for you. What would be worse is to be eternally separated from the God who created you. What would be worse is to live without the forgiveness and peace God offers you. All that would be worse. Jesus' point is that no matter what else may be going on in your life, physically or otherwise, to be spiritually infirmed would be worse.

For many of us, if we have the blessings of physical health in our life, we probably wouldn't trade that for anything. But to be spiritually alive, to be at peace with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, to daily live with the promise of salvation Christ won for us, to know that for our every sin and wrongdoing we confess, we may receive forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Lord – well, there's nothing greater than that.

Here in this story Jesus not only addresses the physical needs of this man, but more importantly, He addresses his spiritual needs as well. And yet, that's still not our Lord's only concern.

Look back in this story to something that is often easy for us to skip over. Remember that when Jesus happens upon this man, He asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

Now, if you have had a physical ailment you have lived with for 38 years and you have been waiting day in and day out for some miraculous healing and someone unexpectedly asked you, “Do you want to get well?” wouldn’t it seem natural to respond with an enthusiastic, “Yes”? In all these years, can you imagine how many times this man may have called out for someone to help him into the water when it started to stir, but no one helped? How disappointing. How discouraging. How depressing.

And so now someone asks him if he wants to get well and instead of replying with eagerness and enthusiasm, he only offers an excuse. “There’s no one to help me in the water.” Why do you suppose that was his response? Well maybe it’s because this man is at a point in his life where he has simply given up hope. You see, it’s very likely that after 38 years he has sunk into a pit of despair. It could very well be that in addition to the care he has received here for his physical well-being and his spiritual well-being, what this man also needed was care for his mental or emotional well-being too.

I suggest that when Jesus approached this man that day, He came to address his physical, spiritual, and mental well-being. And if Jesus is concerned with this man’s physical, spiritual, and mental well-being; then why would we not be concerned for all three in our life, and the life of others, as well?

A few years ago, I preached at my home church during the month of May which is national mental health awareness month. In that sermon, I said that just as there is really no shame in seeing a doctor for issues with our physical health, likewise there should be no shame in seeing a doctor or counselor or therapist, or even taking medication if needed, for our own mental health.

A few weeks later, as I stood at the door to greet people on their way out of church, I noticed a woman who purposely stayed back so she could be the last person in line. When she shook my hand, she said she was in church a few weeks earlier when I talked about how we really don’t need to feel any shame in seeing a doctor or counselor or therapist for a mental health issue.

She went on to tell me that she has been living with severe panic attacks for several years because of something she experienced years earlier. However, over the years she has been hesitant to get any kind of professional help because she thought that if her faith was stronger she should be able to get over something like this. Because of that feeling, she never gave herself permission to seek help. But she said after she heard what I said a few weeks earlier in my sermon, she decided to contact a counselor that week. And so far, she said, she hasn’t felt this good in a long time. “Thank you for saying what you did,” she concluded.

Now here was a someone who felt like her situation was hopeless. She felt too much shame to ask for help. She had fallen into the pit of despair. The fact that her anxiety attacks weren’t getting better led her into a period of depression. “If only my faith was stronger,” she kept telling herself. But what she heard in church a few weeks earlier gave her a sense of permission to recognize that it’s okay to not just attend to her physical well-being, not just her spiritual well-being, but her mental and emotional well-being also. And why not? God has created us with body, mind, and spirit.

There at the pool of Bethesda one day, Jesus physically healed a man. Spiritually, he breathed new life into this man. Mentally and emotionally, Jesus brought hope to this man. And why not? God has created every one of us with body, mind, and spirit. And certainly, the church is a place where we can openly acknowledge that.

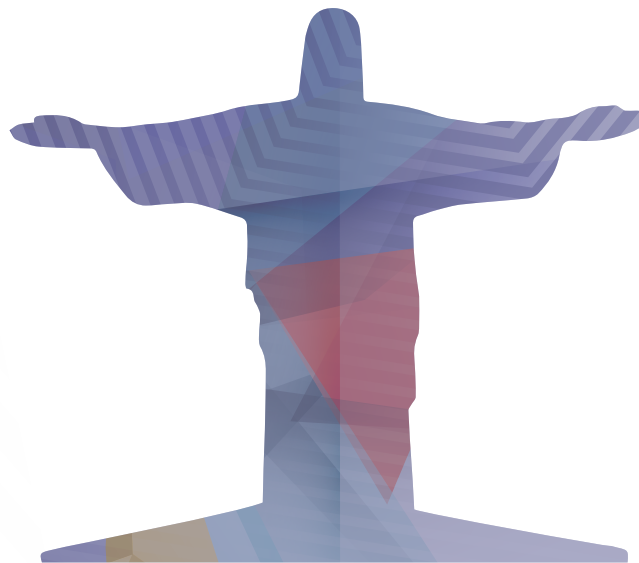
Maybe in your life, or in the life of someone you know, maybe the issue is cancer, or heart disease, or diabetes, or the coronavirus, or some other physical health concern. And if it is, we want the church to be a place where we can talk openly with each other about such things, pray for one another, encourage each other to seek appropriate care, and of course make no judgement toward one another for what any of us may be going through.

So likewise, what if the issue is depression, or anxiety, or suicidal thoughts or substance misuse? Here too, we want the church to be a place where we can talk openly with each other about such things, pray for one another, encourage each other to seek appropriate care and of course make no judgment toward one another for what any of us may be going through. Why? Because through Jesus Christ, we have a hope that transcends all circumstances – spiritually, physically, and mentally.

In Hebrews 2 we read: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity.” These words remind us that if anyone understands our physical well-being, our spiritual well-being, and yes even our mental or emotional well-being – Jesus does. Why? Because He too was one of us. But not only was Jesus like us in His human nature; in His divine nature He also came to love us, to redeem us, to save us, to forgive us, to give us hope – spiritually, physically, and mentally.

I pray that the church is always a place that expresses that truly being well is about our spiritual, physical, and mental well-being.

Amen.



*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I
may know how to sustain the weary with the word.*

1 Peter 5:7

STRATEGY

A Step-by-Step Strategy for Creating a Mental Health Ministry

CRAWL

Crawl steps do not require much money, extravagant resources, or paid staff. They are beginner steps for creating your mental health ministry.

CRAWL	STEP 1	STEP 2
ACTION	Have a designated Mental Health Advocate (MHA) in your congregation.	The MHA helps build a mental health ministry (MHM) team in your congregation with the support of the pastor and church leadership.
IDEAS	The MHA participates in The Lutheran Foundation's (TLF's) MHA group each month, receiving guidance and support.	Invite someone from each of your key ministry teams. Consider members who are health care professionals, teachers, counselors, social workers, interior decorators, and those with lived experience and their families. Name your group.
PEOPLE INVOLVED		
TARGET DATE		
COMPLETION DATE		
NOTES		

CRAWL	STEP 3	STEP 4
ACTION	Conduct the Congregational Mental and Behavioral Health Needs Assessment within your congregation.	Schedule a time to review the results with TLF.
IDEAS	Distribute the link to the assessment via church email, newsletter, website, etc. This assessment could be distributed in hard copy form at the end of worship service, in a Bible class setting, etc.	TLF will collect the data and share results with the pastor and MHA at each congregation.
PEOPLE INVOLVED		
TARGET DATE		
COMPLETION DATE		
NOTES		

CRAWL	STEP 5	STEP 6	STEP 7
ACTION	Create a simple plan of action based on the assessment results.	Utilize the faith-based mental health resources on Look Up Indiana within worship, Bible study, and various ministry settings.	Participate in Companionship Training. Also consider basic suicide prevention training such as QPR.
IDEAS	TLF can review the survey data with you and help guide your next steps in planning ed. activities and trainings to best meet expressed needs.	Use in bulletin inserts, newsletter, social media, etc. Receive and share ideas in the MHA monthly meetings and on the MHA Facebook Group.	This is ideal for your Mental Health team, elders, greeters, etc.
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

CRAWL	STEP 8	STEP 9	STEP 10
ACTION	Invite people living with mental illness to share their story during adult Bible study class to help bring awareness to the importance and need for an intentional mental health ministry in your church.	Create a referral list of mental health resources available in your community.	Provide free space for NAMI support groups to meet in your church.
IDEAS	Consider hosting the free presentation "Bridges of Hope" by NAMI at your church to help reduce the stigma of mental illness.	Collaborate with the MHA Facilitator and other MHAs in the monthly meetings and FB Group to create this list. Make this list readily available within your congregation.	Contact your local NAMI to let them know.
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

CRAWL	STEP 11	STEP 12	STEP 13
ACTION	Pray for people who are living with mental illness and their families in worship services and privately.	Give hope to people who are mentally ill by providing encouragement.	Plan to attend the 2022 Look Up Conference.
IDEAS	Use the prayers in The Mental Health Toolkit. Consider having a designated prayer room, prayer garden, or other space available for prayer.	Phone calls, texts, emails, letters, in-person conversations, meals, quilts, etc.	Encourage the pastor and several others from the congregation to attend including the congregation's MHA, members of the congregation's mental health team, and others.
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

WALK

Walk steps require some training and minimal financial support. There is a greater level of commitment, but most churches can take these steps.

WALK	STEP 1	STEP 2
ACTION	Ask pastor to preach on mental illness related topics from time to time.	Build a mental health library with books and other resources.
IDEAS	Refer to some of the sermon starter ideas in The Mental Health Toolkit.	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist in creating a mental health library.**
PEOPLE INVOLVED		
TARGET DATE		
COMPLETION DATE		
NOTES		

WALK	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
ACTION	Conduct a Bible study on a mental health topic.	Invite more people to join your MHM team.	Equip your mental health ministry team with the Hope for Mental Health Ministry Starter Kit from Saddleback Church.
IDEAS	Refer to the Look Up Indiana faith-based resources and The Mental Health Toolkit for ideas.	Personal invitations work best.	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with costs associated for the Mental Health Ministry Starter Kit. **
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

WALK	STEP 6	STEP 7	STEP 8
ACTION	Train more people in Companionship, QPR, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA), etc.	Train volunteers in Stephen Ministry and/or provide for their continuing education.	Hold quarterly educational workshops/trainings at your church on various mental health topics.
IDEAS	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with the costs associated with training and education.**	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with the costs associated with training and education.**	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with the workshop and/or training events.**
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

WALK	STEP 9	STEP 10	STEP 11
ACTION	Regularly connect your church members with opportunities to serve those with mental illness.	Communicate about your mental health ministry on a regular basis.	Apply for a TLF Mental Health Ministry Grant.
IDEAS	The TLF MHA Facilitator can help connect you to various organizations in the community.	Include articles in a mental health section of your church's newsletter, announce events in the bulletin and social media posts, have a tab on the church's website, etc.	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with a Mental Health Ministry.**
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

RUN

Walk steps require some training and minimal financial support. There is a greater level of commitment, but most churches can take these steps.

RUN	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3
ACTION	Provide church staff and mental health ministry team members with more advanced mental health care training.	Start mental and behavioral health support groups.	Create care teams who will commit to help with basic needs of families impacted.
IDEAS	MHFA, YMHFA, QPR, ASSIST, Sources of Strength, Living Works Faith, Spiritual First Aid, etc. A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with training of ministry team members.**	For example: Grace Groups or Thrive Groups through Grace Alliance, Celebrate Recovery, etc. A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with the costs of training materials.**	Help with household tasks, babysitting, transportation to doctor visits, basic home repairs, etc.
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

RUN	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6
ACTION	Establish serving opportunities for people living with severe mental illness.	Have people in your congregation trained to be the trainer of various mental health workshops.	Host a mental health fair introducing your congregation and neighborhood to resources in the community/host a one-day mental health conference.
IDEAS	Mentors would be needed to walk alongside them as they serve.	QPR, Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Companionship, etc. A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with the costs of training.**	Contact local resources in the community: Parkview Behavioral Health, Park Center, Lutheran Social Services of Indiana, Cross Connections, the county health department, MHA to provide resources.
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

RUN	STEP 7	STEP 8	STEP 9
ACTION	Create a new full-time or part-time staff position at your church that includes mental health ministry.	Become a model of what every church can do about mental illness by being a reliable source of information about mental illness.	Apply for a TLF Mental Health Ministry grant if eligible.
IDEAS	Deaconess, Parish Nurse, Director of Care Ministry, etc. Consider implementing this step as early as possible in the Run stage. A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant for a new staff position.**	Share your knowledge with other congregations to assist them in their mental health ministry initiatives. Collaborate with other congregations.	A congregation may be eligible to apply for a TLF grant to assist with a Mental Health Ministry.**
PEOPLE INVOLVED			
TARGET DATE			
COMPLETION DATE			
NOTES			

***NOTE:** This checklist has been adapted from “A Church-Initiated Mental Health Strategy” from Saddleback’s Hope for Mental Health.

****The suggestion of applying for a TLF grant does not guarantee funding. Before submitting a grant application, the congregation must contact The Reverend Dennis Goff, Director of Ministry to review program ideas. TLF grants are a minimum of \$1500 and applications requesting 100% funding of the total cost are not considered. For more information, refer to TLF’s website <https://thelutheranfoundation.org/investing/grants/lutheran-grants>, or contact Sue Faust, Grants Manager, at 260-458-2105 with your grant related questions.**

RESOURCES

Mental Health Related Organizations

The Lutheran Foundation suggests these national resources that can assist your church or faith community with developing a mental health ministry focus. For local resources, visit www.LookUpIndiana.org.



Mental Health Ministries is an interfaith web-based ministry which provides educational resources to help erase the stigma of mental illness in faith communities.

<http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/>



The Hope for Mental Health Ministry was developed by Rick and Kay Warren at Saddleback Church. This ministry provides the transforming love of Jesus Christ, support, and hope through local churches to people living with mental illness and their families.

www.hope4mentalhealth.com



Pathways to Promise is an interfaith cooperative committed to creating an atmosphere in the faith and mental health communities which promotes recovery from mental illness and invites people with mental illnesses to enrich the community through actively sharing their gifts and interests.

<http://www.pathways2promise.org/>



Mental Health Gateway is a comprehensive, faith-based mental health resource serving the Houston community and beyond.

<https://hopeandhealingcenter.org/gateway-to-hope/>



Fresh Hope for Mental Health is an international network of Christian peer-to-peer led support groups for those who have a mental health diagnosis and for their loved ones.

<https://www.freshhope.us/>



My Quiet Cave strives to provide people everywhere with a safe space to pursue both mental and spiritual wellness. Their programs are designed to create community, model vulnerability, empower self-care, and embrace each person's innate value as a beloved child of God.

<https://myquietcave.org/>



Key Ministry promotes meaningful connection between churches and families of kids with disabilities for the purpose of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

<https://www.keyministry.org/mentalhealthandthechurch>



Mental Health Grace Alliance is a Christian mental health recovery and support organization that provides resources, support groups, and training to pastors and community leaders so they can help those affected by mental illness. They develop Christ-centered, curriculum-based models for family and peer support groups, trauma and PTSD groups, and young adult groups.

<https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org/>



Full Strength Network is a nonprofit ministry created to strengthen Christian pastors and their families for their overall well-being. They are a growing national network of caregivers and service providers passionate about helping pastors and their families thrive in ministry life.

<https://fullstrength.org/>



The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention provides every faith tradition and denomination with a set of assembled communications and aids in spiritual resources to help prevent suicides in their communities.

<https://theactionalliance.org/communities/faith-communities>



The Interfaith Network on Mental Illness offers written and web resources, consultation, free presentations, and guidelines for starting Mental Health Ministries and/or Spiritual Support Groups for Mental Health and Wellness.

<http://inmi.us/>



NAMI FaithNet is an interfaith resource network of NAMI members, friends, clergy and congregations of all faith traditions who wish to encourage faith communities who are welcoming and supportive of persons and families living with mental illness.

<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet>



Run Hard. Rest Well. introduces restorative wellness to organizations and individuals through transformative seminars and half-day retreats. We help people rediscover simple and strategic commitments that reduce cortisol overload, feed the soul, and fuel joy and vibrancy through preventative care practices, crisis, and recovery.

<https://runhardrestwell.org/>