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MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

2023



#breakthestigma

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

POWERED BY

THE **Lutheran**
Foundation

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Introduction

The Lutheran Foundation prepared this fourth edition of our Mental Health Toolkit to help fulfill our mission of advancing Gospel sharing and promoting mental wellness that silences the stigma of mental illness.

The 2023 Mental Health Toolkit is designed to be a practical “one-stop-shop” for faith-based mental health resources that your congregation can use to promote mental wellness, provide comfort, and instill hope.

Some new features in this year’s toolkit include: a sample installation service of your congregation’s Mental Health Advocate and/or mental health ministry team members, a new Bible study on resiliency, a strategic planning tool for developing mental health ministry in your church, new prayers related to mental health, an audio file for the hymn “Father of Body, Mind, and Spirit,” and more.

While these materials were created in recognition of and in conjunction with Mental Health Awareness Month in May, many of the resources within the 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.

In addition to this toolkit, you’ll find more faith-based mental health resources online at LookUpIndiana.org/faith-mental-health.

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.

If you have questions about how to implement any of the material in this toolkit, feel free to email me: carole@thelutheranfoundation.org, or call me at (260) 458-2115. I am happy to consult with you and connect you with additional resources upon request.

In Christ’s Service and Yours,

Deaconess Carole Terkula
Ministry Associate at The Lutheran Foundation

Bible Study Preface

Developing Resiliency Toward Better Whole Person Health: A Biblical Overview

This Bible study was created for use by congregations desiring to address the topic of mental health. It examines the Biblical foundation for whole person wellness and the interplay that our physical, mental, and spiritual health have upon one another and our whole person well-being.

This study was written for adults but could also be used by high school youth groups. It is divided into five sections (section headers are in blue) with discussion questions at the end of each section. At the end of sections 2-4, there are resources listed (the resource headers are in green) to further equip the Church. 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.

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 team as part of their continuing education during their monthly caregiver meetings. Others have used previous toolkit Bible studies in adult Sunday School classes, in church staff meetings, in mental health ministry meetings, and in private pastoral/diaconal counseling sessions with individuals living with a mental health concern. Consider which groups or individuals in your church might benefit from this study.

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
March 2023

Bible Study

Developing Resiliency Toward Better Whole Person Health: A Biblical Overview

By Deaconess Carole Terkula

Introduction

During the past several years, and especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, resiliency has been a buzzword and topic of great interest. What exactly is resiliency and how can we learn from God's Word about how to develop resiliency to best cope with life's struggles, including mental health concerns?

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines resiliency as "an ability to recover or adjust easily to adversity or change." Here is another way to think of resiliency: Resiliency is the ability to cope mentally and emotionally in difficult circumstances by employing thought processes and behaviors which help protect against the negative effects of stressors. Indeed, research shows that resiliency can be cultivated and practiced. In fact, caring for whole person health (body, mind, and spirit) increases resiliency.

This connection between whole person well-being and resiliency is an interesting one, especially when we call to mind how Jesus cares for people holistically as described in various Gospel accounts of His miraculous healings. When we look at some of Jesus' miraculous healings in Scripture, we see that He cares for peoples' whole person well-being by restoring their bodies, minds, and their relationship with God and others.

This Bible study will examine some Biblical principles/practices which develop resiliency through whole person care: physically, mentally/emotionally, and spiritually.

I. Setting the Stage: A Look at Jesus' Whole Person Care Approach

Read John 5:1-15

1) A. According to this text, how long had the man at the pool been unable to walk?

B. Although Scripture does not describe this man's mental or emotional state at the time when Jesus meets him, how do you suppose he felt? How would you describe what his mental and emotional outlook may have been?

- 2) Now imagine the man's mental and emotional state after Jesus heals him. How do you think his physical healing affected his mental and emotional well-being?

- 3) A. Where does Jesus later find the man according to verse 14?

- B. Discuss the impact that the man's physical healing may have had on his faith.

- C. What do you think the man was doing at the temple?

- D. Discuss how the man's being restored to spiritual community at the temple may have continued to affect his spiritual, mental/emotional, and physical well-being over the long haul.

- 4) Discuss the idea that God has made us as complex beings comprised of body, mind, and soul, and how each of these aspects of our humanity affects the others and our whole well-being.

- 5) Reflect on a time when you were facing a particularly challenging time in your life. Think back and record some of the specific things you did from a whole person health perspective that positively affected your resiliency to get through that experience. Some examples have been provided for you.

<u>Incident</u>	<u>Physical</u>	<u>Mental/Emotional</u>	<u>Spiritual</u>
Job Loss	Walked in the neighborhood each evening.	Spoke with sister over the phone each week to share experience and get support.	Listened to Christian music on the radio every day.

- 6) Additionally, think about some things you may have done during the time you reflected on in question 5 that may have had a negative impact on your resiliency and overall well-being at that time. What have you learned about things that hinder resiliency from that experience? Share as you feel comfortable.

II. Developing Resiliency Through Physical Care

God has created us as physical beings with bodies which require proper care, such as exercise, rest, and good nutrition to stay healthy and strong. Let's examine some passages from Scripture which address the importance of caring for our physical needs.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

- 7) What does this passage have to say about the importance of the body?
- 8) What is the connection between our physicality and spirituality?
- 9) Verse 20 mentions being bought at a price. What was that price and who paid it?
- 10) In what ways can we honor God with our bodies?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-56 and Philippians 3:20-21.

- 11) What do these passages have to say concerning the value and importance God has placed on our bodies?

Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Mark 2:27-28.

- 12) What do these passages have to say about the importance of physical rest on the Sabbath and why God made the Sabbath?
- 13) Discuss how God intends the Sabbath to be a day of spiritual, physical, and mental restoration for mankind.
- 14) How has modern culture affected our view and practice of the Sabbath?

- 15) A. What are some ways in which you find rest on Sundays?
- B. How might you be more intentional about making sure you are getting the rest you need on Sundays in order to be “fully charged” for service in the week ahead?

Read Mark 6:30-32

- 16) In addition to having a quiet space to get some sleep/a nap, what other important element is included in Jesus’ concept of “rest” for the disciples?

Read Daniel 1:1-15

- 17) What sort of food and beverage had the best impact on Daniel and his friends’ health?
- 18) A. Reflect on your own diet. How much of your plate or glass is filled with the types of things Daniel consumed?
- B. How could you be more intentional about making sure you are consuming these types of foods/beverages in your daily meals?

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

- 19) Discuss the interrelationship between Elijah’s physical needs on his mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being in this passage.
- 20) Share a time when your physical needs impacted your thoughts, words, and deeds. What have you learned from that experience? Share as you feel comfortable.

Note: Did you know that there is a correlation between some physical conditions/ illnesses and mental health? That’s why it is so important to check with your primary care physician if you are experiencing signs and symptoms of a mental health concern. It is recommended that you have a physical exam each year for your overall health.

Resources Addressing Better Physical Health for Resiliency and Overall Well-Being

- Personal Retreat Opportunity--A Personal Day Away at Camp Lutherhaven, Albion, IN
<https://lutherhaven.org/program/retreats/personal/>

Camp Lutherhaven offers “A Day Away” personal retreat opportunity to offer you a quiet place to be with the Lord, free from phones, distractions, and noise where you can meet the Father amidst God’s creation.

- Run Hard. Rest Well Retreats
<https://runhardrestwell.org/>

Run Hard. Rest Well Retreats offer a transformative blueprint of work, rest, and rhythm.

- Run the Race Curriculum for Students
<https://runhardrestwell.org/run-the-race/>

Run the Race is a video-based curriculum for teens on restorative wellness that helps youth learn about the impact of stress on their lives and teaches them how to reduce stress and cultivate connections for health.

- Sources of Strength (for youth)
<https://sourcesofstrength.org/>

Sources of Strength is a best practice youth suicide prevention project utilizing an upstream model approach to strengthen protective factors toward resiliency.

- Organizations which help address compassion fatigue and burnout among pastors and other church workers:
<https://lookupindiana.org/faith-mental-health/faith-leader-resources/self-care>

III. Developing Resiliency Through Mental and Emotional Care

Baptismal Identity in Jesus Christ

The most important thing we can do to foster resiliency is to remember and rely upon our identity in Christ bestowed on us in Baptism. While we may only tend to think of our Baptismal identity from a spiritual point of view, it also has a profound impact on our mental and emotional well-being because it is the solid foundation upon which our view of self and our value and worth are set. Indeed, our Baptismal identity in Jesus Christ is the anchor for our heart, mind, and soul when the storms of life arise and rage battle against us.

Let us explore some Scripture passages which remind us of God’s truth about who we are to Him and who we are in Him, which give us peace of mind, calm our emotions, and provide rest for our troubled souls.

Read Isaiah 43:1-2,4

- 21) Put your first name in verse one in place of “O Jacob” and “O Israel,” and read the verse out loud.
- A. How did that affect the impact of this verse on you?
 - B. How does it feel to know that Almighty God knows you by name and claims you as His treasured possession?
 - C. When did God claim you as His own, as a member of His family?
- 22) A. According to verse 4, how does God view you?
- B. Reading verse 4 Christologically, how can we interpret the words “I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life?” In other words, when did “The great exchange” happen for us?
 - C. How can you intentionally call verse 4 to mind when you are having a difficult day? How can you intentionally share it with someone else who may be going through difficult circumstances which have affected their view of self?
 - D. Is there someone you know right now who could benefit from hearing these verses from Isaiah?

Read Galatians 3:26-29

- 23) Discuss what it means to be “baptized *into* Christ.”
- 24) Through faith in Christ, you are God’s heir. Discuss what your inheritance is.
- 25) How do these verses inform your sense of value and worth as a human being?

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

- 26) Discuss the impact of knowing and believing that you are God’s “workmanship.”

27) A. How might you be able to share this verse with someone you know who feels that they are a “mistake,” or that they don’t have value or purpose in this life?

B. How might God’s truth in these verses aid in bolstering resiliency?

28) What are some specific things you can do to allow all the Scripture passages in this section to permeate your mind, heart, and soul toward better resiliency?

29) How might the Scripture passages in this section bless someone recently diagnosed with a mental illness who feels as if the label of their diagnosis has impacted their identity and sense of worth?

Community Building

Another important component that aids in developing resiliency toward better mental and emotional health is a sense of belonging in community. In fact, research has shown that for people living with mental health concerns, having a sense of belonging and connection in community aids in their mental wellness journey. God has indeed made us as social creatures who thrive in relationship with Him and one another.

30) A. Discuss the impact that self-isolation/quarantine had on your mental and emotional health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. When congregations were not able to worship in person during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, how did that affect your congregational community? Are there lingering effects?

Let’s examine a passage from Scripture which demonstrates the importance and impact of community connection.

Read Mark 5:1-20

31) Discuss how the isolation and experience of having been chained may have impacted the demon possessed man’s human dignity and sense of self.

32) Upon his healing, the man desires to follow Jesus. Yet what does Jesus say to him?

33) Jesus’ mandate for this man to return to his family shows Jesus’ compassionate care of him. How do you think the man’s being enabled to rejoin his family continued to aid in his

mental and emotional well-being?

- 34) On his way to be reunited with his family, the man interacts with many people in the region. How do you think his being restored to the larger community affected his sense of dignity, worth, and overall mental and emotional well-being?
- 35) How did God use this man for His glory and to expand His kingdom?
- 36) Think about the people in your congregation living with physical, mental, or emotional challenges. How might your congregation intentionally reach out to include them more in the mission, ministry, and life of the church? What might be the impact of doing this on the individual, their family, your church family, and community?

Resources for Care and Community Building to Foster Resiliency and Overall Well-Being

- Companionship Workshop through Pathways to Promise
<https://www.thecompanionshipmovement.org/>

This 4-hour workshop is designed to help individuals learn to gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage in genuine relationships with people in need, including those facing emotional and mental health issues, and connect them with appropriate care. This is an ideal workshop for greeters, elders, Stephen Ministers, mental health ministry teams, small group leaders and those in your congregation involved with outreach activities. To set up a Companionship Workshop in the Ft. Wayne area, contact Deaconess Carole Terkula: carole@thelutheranfoundation.org.

- Grace for the Afflicted
Free online Ebook: https://www.mybibleteacher.net/uploads/1/2/4/6/124618875/grace_for_the_afflicted_by_matthew_s._stanford_z-lib.org_.pdf
Free Online Discussion Guide: <https://mentalhealthgateway.org/wp-content/uploads/Grace-for-the-Afflicted-Discussion-Guide.pdf>
Grace for the Afflicted is written to educate Christians about mental illness from both Biblical and scientific perspectives. The small group discussion guide facilitates discussion around mental health from a holistic health perspective, emphasizing the body, mind, and spirit connection.
- GriefShare
<https://www.griefshare.org/>

GriefShare is a Biblical, Christ-centered grief recovery support group ministry which has grief support groups that meet across the country. You can check their website to find a local grief group in your area. If your church would like to begin a GriefShare group, they offer resources to help you equip a lay-led team for effective and ongoing grief ministry in your congregation.

- Mental Health Grace Alliance
<https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org/>

Mental Health Grace Alliance offers workbooks that combine relevant Bible studies, neuroscience, and practical tools to help those experiencing a mental health difficulty to manage stressors, increase calm through rest and joy, reframe negative thoughts and nurture healthy relationships. The workbooks can be used by individuals or in small group settings. Group facilitator training and materials are available through their website.

- Stephen Ministry
<https://www.stephenministries.org/default.cfm>

Stephen Ministry is a Christian ministry in which lay people are trained and equipped to walk alongside those in their congregation who are hurting and in need of some extra care, encouragement, and support.

- Additional resources can be found in the Resource Guide located on pages 47-61 in The Lutheran Foundation's 2022 Mental Health Toolkit on the Look Up Indiana website:
<https://lookupindiana.org/resources/toolkit>

IV. Developing Resiliency Through Spiritual Care

There are several spiritual practices mentioned in the Bible which lend themselves to the strengthening of faith and nourishment of our souls, contributing to resiliency. Let's explore some of these spiritual practices which enhance overall well-being.

Prayer

Read Mark 1:35-37, Luke 11:1-4, Luke 22: 39-46

- 37) Why do you think Jesus frequently retreated to a solitary place for personal prayer time with His Heavenly Father?
- 38) How did Jesus' habit of personal prayer time impact his disciples?

39) A. What does your personal prayer time with God look like?

B. What affect does prayer have on your emotional, mental, and spiritual state?

Two kinds of prayer, in particular, can greatly aid in spiritual growth as well as mental and emotional well-being. The first is a prayer of thankfulness and the other is a prayer of lament.

Read Psalm 106:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Colossians 3:15-17

40) According to these verses, why do we give thanks to God?

41) Who is the source of a Christian's joy and praise?

42) A. According to these verses, is our thankfulness tied to our earthly circumstances?

B. How could giving thanks to God in difficult circumstances affect our perspective, attitude, and overall well-being?

It is interesting to note that science now proves the practice of thankfulness and gratitude is good for us. In fact, research has shown that a practice of gratefulness can increase our sense of joy and overall well-being. "When we express gratitude and receive the same, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, the two crucial neurotransmitters responsible for our emotions, and they make us feel 'good'. They enhance our mood immediately, making us feel happy from the inside. By consciously practicing gratitude every day, we can help these neural pathways to strengthen themselves" (<https://positivepsychology.com/neuroscience-of-gratitude/>).

A recent study at Berkley "suggests that gratitude writing can be beneficial not just for healthy, well-adjusted individuals, but also for those who struggle with mental health concerns. In fact, it seems, practicing gratitude on top of receiving psychological counseling carries greater benefits than counseling alone, even when that gratitude practice is brief" (https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain).

How fearfully and wonderfully God has made us! What He has told us to do in the Bible regarding thankfulness is actually designed for our overall well-being!

Lament is another type of prayer that can be a balm for our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, especially during life's difficulties. Prayers of lament allow us to express pain and suffering to God openly and authentically and to rest in His promises to hear us and to be with us in and through these difficulties.

The author Aubrey Sampson gives a nice explanation of Biblical lament in this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtZoDYxcdM0&t=1s>

Read Psalm 22

43) Psalm 22 is the most referenced Psalm in the New Testament. In fact, the first verse may ring a bell for you. Who spoke Psalm 22:1 in the most dire of circumstances? (See Matthew 27:35)

44) The Psalms of Lament typically follow a pattern:

- Calling out to God using one of His names, form of address
- Crying out to God, expressing your emotions, suffering, and pain
- Asking God for help
- Affirmation of God's character and your trust/faith in Him

Pull out the phrases from Psalm 22 which exemplify the pattern of lament above and list them below:

- Calling out to God:
- Crying out to God:
- Asking God for help:
- Affirmation of Faith in God:

The Trauma Healing Institute has created a wonderful outline and tool to help people create their own prayer of lament using the pattern above. Practice writing your own prayer of lament using this free downloadable resource and then discuss how it felt to pray in such a way. Click here to access this guide: <https://www.traumahealingbasics.org/how-to-lament>

45) As a group, discuss how a prayer of lament can be cathartic for the individual praying it and how lament can also draw an individual closer to God amid trials and suffering.

Corporate Worship

The regular practice of in-person corporate worship also cultivates and nourishes faith toward greater resiliency. Let's examine some aspects of corporate worship which aid in spiritual formation, growth, and resiliency.

The Preaching of God's Word

Read Romans 10:14-17 and Romans 16:25-27

46) A. According to Romans 10:14-17, from where does faith come? Which sense is utilized?

- 47) According to Romans 16:25-27, in what way does the preaching of the Gospel impact Christians who hear it?

Receiving the Lord's Supper

Luther's *Small Catechism* does a nice job summarizing the spiritual benefits of receiving the Lord's Supper. **Read Part II "The Benefit of the Sacrament of Altar" within the Explanation of "The Sacrament of the Altar" as it appears in [Luther's Small Catechism](http://catechism.cph.org/).**
<http://catechism.cph.org/>

- 48) The *Small Catechism* lists four spiritual blessings of receiving the Lord's Supper as understood through Scripture. List these benefits below:
- A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
- 49) How can each of these spiritual blessings impact overall resiliency? Be as specific as possible, reflecting on the examples from Scripture listed in the *Small Catechism*.

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

- 50) What are some additional benefits of participating in corporate worship according to this passage?
- 51) Discuss how in-person worship and Christian fellowship impact resiliency and a sense of overall well-being.
- 52) How is your congregation intentionally reaching out to members who may have fallen away from coming to worship regularly and/or church activities due to the pandemic?

Resources Addressing Spiritual Care for Resiliency and Overall Well-Being

- If you or someone you know is looking for a church home, please contact Deaconess Carole Terkula at The Lutheran Foundation to get connected to a caring congregation in your area: carole@thelutheranfoundation.org; 260-458-2115.

- Living Compass

<https://www.livingcompass.org/>

Living Compass provides individuals, families, and congregations with free tools toward better whole person health, including a free wellness assessment tool for teens, parents, and adults, which includes questions on soul care and spirituality:

<https://www.livingcompass.org/assessment-introduction>

Living Compass offers free corresponding workbooks which can be used by individuals or in small groups called “Wellness Circles.” Faith-based versions of the wellness circles are available. They also have free 4-week topical class materials on a variety of topics related to mental health and overall well-being:

<https://shop.livingcompass.org/collections/topical-wellness-classes>

- The Sanctuary Course

<https://sanctuarymentalhealth.org/sanctuary-course/>

The Sanctuary Course is for anyone who wants to learn more about faith and mental health. It is a free 8-session small group curriculum that helps congregations explore how to offer companionship, support recovery, and promote overall well-being in people living with mental health issues.

V. Conclusion

This Bible study has explored some practices described in Scripture which contribute toward resiliency through whole person care: body, mind, and spirit. It is important to remember that each of these distinct aspects of our humanity are interrelated and that people thrive when each aspect is well cared for, nourished, and supported.

Wrap-Up Discussion Questions

- 53) Was there a particular point in this Bible study that has stuck with you?
- 54) What are some of the practices described in this Bible study that you would like to incorporate or strengthen in your own life for greater resiliency?

55) How can your congregation help foster resiliency toward better whole person health among your congregation members and community?

For free faith-based mental health resources, please visit the [LookUpIndiana.org](https://lookupindiana.org)

<https://lookupindiana.org/faith-mental-health>

If your congregation would like information about how to begin or expand a mental health ministry, please contact Deaconess Carole Terkula: carole@thelutheranfoundation.org; 260-458-2115.

Closing Prayer

Gracious Father, You have knit us together, and we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We thank you for providing for all our needs of body, mind, and soul. Help us in our care of one another, that we may reflect Your Son Jesus' compassion to people in our midst who are suffering in various ways. Strengthen and equip our congregation to be a warm and caring place as we tend to peoples' spiritual, mental, and physical needs. Amen.

This Bible study was written by Deaconess Carole Terkula, Ministry Associate at The Lutheran Foundation on May 31, 2022.

Books on the Topic of Mental Health

Consider forming a book club in your congregation where you could read and discuss the following books. Or use these books for continuing education for your church staff, Stephen Ministry team, mental health ministry team, etc.

- **Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness, Family and Church**

By Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund, 2014

When do you learn that "normal" doesn't include lots of yelling, lots of sleeping, lots of beating? In *Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness, Family, and Church*, Sarah Griffith Lund looks back at her father's battle with bipolar disorder and the helpless sense of déjà vu as her brother and cousin endure mental illness as well. With a small group study guide and "Ten Steps for Developing a Mental Health Ministry in Your Congregation," *Blessed Are the Crazy* is more than a memoir—it's a resource for churches and other faith-based groups to provide healing and comfort.

- **Blessed Youth: Breaking the Silence about Mental Health with Children and Teens**

By Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund, 2022

Through vivid and powerful storytelling, *Blessed Youth: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness with Children and Teens* will remove the barriers of stigma and shame associated with mental illness in children and teens. Readers will know they are not alone and be reminded of God's grace and loving presence in the midst of the heartache and struggle of mental illness. In addition to stories of children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, *Blessed Youth* includes practical resources such as prayers and a guide for having age-appropriate talks with children about warning signs and how to get help for themselves and friends. Ultimately, this important resource offers hope and help for everyone who loves a child or youth with mental health challenges. Also available is *Blessed Youth Survival Guide*, a pocket-size companion guide for youth.

- **Dementia: Living in the Memories of God**

By John Swinton, 2012

Dementia is one of the most feared diseases in Western society today. In this book, John Swinton develops a practical theology of dementia for caregivers, people with dementia, ministers, hospital chaplains, and medical practitioners as he explores two primary questions:

- Who am I when I've forgotten who I am?

- What does it mean to love God and be loved by God when I have forgotten who God is?

Offering compassionate and carefully considered theological and pastoral responses to dementia and forgetfulness, Swinton's *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* redefines dementia in light of the transformative counter story that is the Gospel.

- **Madness and Grace: A Practical Guide for Pastoral Care and Serious Mental Illness**

By Dr. Matthew Stanford, 2021

Research tells us that when most people suffer from a mental health crisis, the first person they turn to for help is not a physician, a psychiatrist, or a social worker, but rather a pastor, a priest, or a minister. In other words, a leader in their church. Unfortunately, many church leaders are not trained to recognize mental illness and don't know when to refer someone to a mental health professional. The consequence—unintended yet tragic—is continued and unnecessary suffering.

- **The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide**

By Rachael A. Keefe, 2018

Would you know how to respond if the person sitting next to you in your pew was contemplating suicide? Every year, millions of people engage in suicidal activity, including those in our faith communities. Yet the Church remains largely silent around the topics of mental health, depression, and suicide prevention. How can you and your faith community be prepared to recognize and respond to those struggling for their very lives in your church?

In *The Lifesaving Church*, pastor Rachael Keefe shatters the taboo of suicide by sharing her own painful story of life-long depression and suicidality—and how her various faith communities responded, for better and for worse. Opening a window into her suicidal behaviors as a young person, Keefe helps us recognize the signs and struggles of those who suffer silently. Reminding us of the Church's call to be the Body of Christ for each other, Keefe empowers us to recognize the hurting in our communities and recover the lifesaving message of the Gospel—forgiveness, acceptance and love—that helped her to heal.

With chapters on how to educate your church in suicide prevention, group study reflections around the common questions surrounding suicide, and specific resources, scriptures, and prayers for clergy, suicide loss survivors, and those struggling with suicidality, *The Lifesaving Church* is critical reading for faith communities seeking

abundant life for all of its members.

- **What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing**

By Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey, 2021

Our earliest experiences shape our lives far down the road, and *What Happened to You?* provides powerful scientific and emotional insights into the behavioral patterns that so many of us struggle to understand.

Note: These synopses were taken from the book descriptions on Amazon.com.

10 Contemporary Christian Songs of Hope and Comfort

- “Anchor of Peace” by Northpoint Worship
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBnF3VSd0hw&t=11s>
- “Even If” by Mercy Me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6fA35Ved-Y>
- “Eye of the Storm” by Ryan Stevenson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sx8wTnnfSc&t=5s>
- “I Will Carry You” by Ellie Holcomb <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lziBz0d5yOk>
- “Love Has a Name” by Jesus Culture, featuring Kim Walker-Smith
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5x_udKqrXA
- “Oh My Soul” by Casting Crowns <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn5aq54yu8A>
- “Same God” by Elevation Worship https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9av_7iE6lo
- “The Father’s House” by Cory Asbury
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjVi0CDicEQ&t=231s>
- “There Was Jesus” by Zach Williams and Dolly Parton
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_cXBD1Lkrl
- “War of Thoughts” by Scott DeClaire, Jr. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBrmbggfEk>

Hymn Introduction and Recording Information

In Fall 2021, The Lutheran Foundation commissioned an original hymn text and tune to be composed that would have a mental health focus. Several hymn lyricists were contacted who submitted a text. A small committee reviewed the submissions and selected the hymn text written by Rev. Dr. Wilfred Karsten, Pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, in Moline, IL. The title of the hymn he composed is “Father of Body, Mind and Spirit.” The hymn was originally released in The Lutheran Foundation’s 2022 Mental Health Toolkit, and we are reprinting it in this year’s toolkit along with the link to an audio file containing the tune for the hymn (see the link below).

In the conversation we had with Rev. Karsten prior to him composing the text, we emphasized that in the church we comfortably talk about our spiritual health, and we are usually comfortable talking about, and praying for, our physical health. However, there is often stigma or silence in the church related to our mental health. Nevertheless, God has created us with spirit, body, **and mind**. Recognizing our mental and emotional senses, Rev. Karsten references in his hymn such words and phrases like, “make ev’ry anxious worry flee,” “spare me from hopelessly despairing,” and “calm my emotions, hear my plea.”

Additionally, an original tune was composed for this hymn by Matthew Machemer, Associate Kantor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Kantor Machemer’s musical arrangement reflects a calming presence and bold confession of the words we sing. The last three measures add a strong exclamation point to the truth of God’s promised peace He provides to His people.

The Lutheran Foundation commends this hymn text and tune to the church for use in worship. You are free to print and distribute the hymn for use within the church. We encourage the church to take the opportunity to break the stigma of mental illness and acknowledge the importance of mental wellness. We are grateful for the partnership we have had with Rev. Karsten and Kantor Machemer and look forward to this original arrangement being a blessing to the church at large alongside of sermons, prayers, litanies, Bible studies, etc. that acknowledge the significance of mental wellness among us all.

[Click here](#) to access an audio file (in WAV format) of the hymn tune.

Churches without an organist may access a full recording of organ music for the hymn “Father of Body, Mind, and Spirit” through Church Music Solutions. They have licensed the hymn, created a music file for it, and it has been added to their system. Since the hymn does not appear within a hymnal, they have created a custom code for it to use as a hymn number. To order it through Church Music Solutions, set the hymnal as *Lutheran Service Book* and use 455001 for the hymn number.

For more information about Church Music Solutions, contact Sarah Sielbeck, Permissions Specialist at sarahs@churchmusicsolutions.com or by calling (800) 651-7497.

Father of Body, Mind, and Spirit

1. Fa - ther of bo - dy, mind, and spir - it When trou - bles thun - der
2. Sa - vior, my Shep - herd, strong and car - ing Noth - ing can pluck me
3. Com - for - ter Spir - it, In - ter - ces - sor Pray - ing for me with
4. O Fa - ther, Son and Ho - ly Spir - it You hold my fu - ture

through my life, Speak your clear Word that I may hear it;
from your hand, Spare me from hope - less - ly de - spair - ing;
groan - ing sighs, Mold - ing me as a bold con - fes - sor;
days in view, By grace, through faith I will in - her - it

Muf - fle the din, de - stroy all strife. Make ev' - ry an - xious
Raise up my faith, help me to stand. Through your shed blood on
Hold - ing the cross be - fore my eyes. Calm my e - mo - tions;
Per - fect, un - troub - led life with You. Trust - ing in this blest

wor - ry flee; Bring now Your prom - ised peace to me.
Cal - va - ry Bring now your prom - ised peace to me.
hear my plea: Bring now Your prom - ised peace to me.
cer - tain - ty Bring then Your prom - ised peace to me.

Installation of the Mental Health Advocate

To help underscore the importance of the role of the Mental Health Advocate within your congregation and to emphasize the value that the congregation is placing on mental health ministry, you may wish to hold a special rite of installation for your Mental Health Advocate or for your mental health ministry team during a worship service.

This rite is set within the Divine Service before the Prayer of the Church or preceding the Prayers in the Daily Office. The pastor of the congregation serves as the presiding minister.

The Mental Health Advocate(s) is presented before the pastor who stands before the altar. He may greet each one individually with a handshake.

P: Our congregation has asked __ (FIRST AND LAST NAME) __ to serve as our Mental Health Advocate for a minimum of one year. The Mental Health Advocate will work closely with The Lutheran Foundation to develop and sustain mental wellness initiatives within the congregation that reduce the stigma of mental illness, support mental well-being, and provide encouragement and hope to those who are struggling. Additionally, the Mental Health Advocate will communicate regularly with church leadership, staff, and congregation members about educational opportunities and resources related to mental wellness.

The pastor addresses the Advocate(s):

P: Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you are to serve our Lord as our congregation's Mental Health Advocate. Hear what Holy Scripture has to say about those who serve in the Church:

One or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture are read.

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:8-11)

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:3-8)

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in

affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13)

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. . . . ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 21-27).

The pastor addresses the Mental Health Advocate(s):

P: In the presence of God and of this congregation, I install you as Mental Health Advocate in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Stand

P: Let us pray.

Father of all compassion and mercy, bless _____name(s)_____ in his/her/their service to this congregation as our Mental Health Advocate(s) that he/she/they may be faithful in helping us extend Your loving care to those who may be struggling with mental health concerns and their families. Grant that through his/her/their service, Your Gospel hope may be further shared and lived out here among us and our community to the glory of Your most holy name; through Jesus Christ Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

P: Go in the name of the Lord. Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. The almighty and most merciful God, the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit bless and preserve you. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

C: Amen.

The service continues with the Prayer of the Church in the Divine Service or the Prayers in the Daily Office

**Note: This installation service for the Mental Health Advocate was adapted from the rite “Installation of Servants of the Congregation” found on pages 243-245 of the LCMS Lutheran Service Book Agenda. Written by: Deaconess Carole Terkula, Ministry Associate at The Lutheran Foundation*

A Mental Health Inclusion Ministry Strategic Planning Tool

This planning tool is a resource for your congregation's Mental Health Advocate, Mental Health Ministry Team, pastor and/or other church leaders as you build and develop a mental wellness-focused ministry at your church. The questions are organized by topic sections and are intended to help guide your discussions and planning process. We recommend working on one section at a time so that it does not feel overwhelming. You need not address every question that is posed; select what you think is do-able within your congregation. Remember, no church will be able to welcome every individual or family affected by mental illness, *but every church can welcome more children, adults and families touched by mental illness!* Thank you and may God bless your efforts in sharing the Gospel and living it out with compassionate care.

Who needs to be on our Mental Health Ministry Team?

- Who within our congregation might help us better understand the challenges in serving adults, children, and families who experience common mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, and personality disorders, as well as severe mental illnesses including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia? Is there someone trained in trauma-informed care?
- Who within our congregation might help us understand the systems/agencies in place within our community that serve adults, children, and families with chronic mental illness?
- Who within our congregation has the knowledge and experience to help make the physical spaces in which ministry takes place more welcoming to everyone, including individuals and families with mental illness?
- Who within our congregation might help us identify families in our neighborhood and community with mental illness who don't have a church home?

How do we create a welcoming ministry environment for people with mental illness and their families?

- What can we do to help people prone to introversion, anxiety, or less well-developed social skills to have a positive first experience in our church?
- Would a first-time visitor to our church struggle to find where they (or their children) need to go from our signage (both indoor and outdoor)? How can our signage be as clear as possible to reduce stress, anxiety, and frustration?

- Can someone predisposed to severe anxiety/panic attacks in crowded or confined spaces inconspicuously find a comfortable place to sit during worship service?
- Can we identify a quiet place (or spaces) within our facility where an adult or child might go to experience privacy while regaining emotional self-control/composure?
- How can we think about our church space from trauma-informed care best practices? (Is there someone on our mental health ministry team with trauma-informed care training? The Trauma Informed MD website has some helpful tips for churches:
<https://www.traumainformedmd.com/churches.html#/>)
- How might we protect kids we serve with learning differences or mental health concerns from experiencing shame or embarrassment in ministry activities?
- If we have an online platform for presenting worship services of other church activities, how are we using that platform to reach families in our neighborhood and community who are unable to attend church because of mental illness?

How do we help people with mental health conditions to participate in ministry activities for spiritual growth?

- How do we invite and transport kids from families impacted by mental illness to ministry activities most likely to foster spiritual growth (Sunday School, VBS, MOPS, worship services, etc.)?
- What training might we offer to Sunday School teachers, small group leaders, church staff to help make our groups/classes/activities more welcoming to people with mental health conditions? (i.e., Companionship training, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Mental Health First Aid, Spiritual First Aid, Living Works Faith, QPR, etc.)
- Do we make it possible for individuals interested in a ministry activity or event to sign up electronically if they're uncomfortable making phone calls or registering in person?
- How can our Mental Health Advocate and Mental Health Ministry Team members facilitate communication between people requiring some accommodation or support and our staff/volunteers responsible for key areas of ministry?
- How can we use technology to assist children and adults prone to forgetfulness of ministry resources and events? (Reminder app messages, texts, calls, etc.)

- Do we have alternative seating during worship services for persons prone to anxiety in crowded or confined spaces, or for families with children who have mental health concerns, and do the elders/ushers know how to direct people?

How do we best communicate with families impacted by mental illness within our congregation and out?

- How do we use photography or video on our church website and social media platforms to relieve the anxiety a visitor might experience, or the anxiety a child who regularly attends might experience during a special or unfamiliar ministry event/activity? (i.e., provide a virtual online tour of the facility, etc.)
- How often are mental health-related topics addressed in our preaching, public prayers, or announcements during worship services, or in Bible study?
- Do we have a schedule or calendar in place for addressing mental health-related topics during worship services or sharing mental health-related resources through our church's newsletter or social media platforms? (i.e., The National Mental Health Observances Calendar from the Association for Mental and Behavioral Wellness <https://stampoutstigma.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Stamp-Out-Stigma-2023-National-Mental-Health-Observances.pdf>)
- How do we promote relationships between our members and families outside our church impacted by mental illness?
- How do we use our church's website and social media platforms to resource, encourage, and support families impacted by mental illness? Do we share age-appropriate information regarding mental illness through our website, social media platforms, and printed materials? (such as the faith-based resources on [LookUpIndiana.org](https://lookupindiana.org), etc.)
- How can we increase awareness of the mental wellness supports and resources our church and agencies outside our church offer? (i.e., LSSI, NAMI, Mental Health America, Mom of an Addict, Celebrate Recovery, The Lutheran Foundation, Key Ministry, etc.)
- How might an adult indicate their need for support to someone on our ministry team if he/she is uncomfortable approaching an unfamiliar person or making a phone call? (i.e., prayer request cards that go in the offering plate or special drop box, email, etc.)
- Does our church have a system in place to follow up with people who regularly attend worship and other ministry activities but are suddenly absent from these activities for weeks or months?

How might we meet the practical needs of people impacted by mental illness inside and outside the church?

- Do families living with mental illness receive the same supports from the church as any other family dealing with another medical illness? (i.e., casseroles, cards, prayers, encouragement, etc.)
- How can we best meet the practical and immediate needs of parents of kids with mental illness in our church and community? (i.e., respite care, parents' night out, transportation, babysitting siblings, providing a meal, offering speakers or other special events, referrals for mental health services)
- Can we offer or host support groups in our facility for parents? (i.e., NAMI support groups, Grace Groups, etc.)

How might we prepare our staff, volunteers, and members to better support people with mental illness and their families?

- How should our greeters respond if a child is visibly upset upon arrival at church?
- How will our team respond if a child (or parent) appears to be experiencing an emotional crisis within a public space at church?
- What type of staff/volunteer training is needed to minister effectively to individuals and families affected by mental illness? (i.e., Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aid, QPR, Companionship training, Spiritual First Aid training, Trauma-Informed Care training, etc.)
- How should a staff member or volunteer be trained to respond if a person discloses a suicide plan or past suicide attempt, or some other mental health emergency? (i.e., QPR training, Living Works Faith training, C-SSRS training etc.)
- What processes do we have in place to protect the confidentiality of information shared by people with ministry staff and volunteers related to their mental health condition?
- Do we regularly share articles or resources of interest with our staff or key volunteers to help them better understand or minister more effectively with individuals and families impacted by mental illness? (i.e., the faith-based resources on [LookUpIndiana.org](https://www.lookupindiana.org), etc.)

**Note: This document, created by Deaconess Carole Terkula at The Lutheran Foundation, is an abbreviated adaptation of Key Ministry's free downloadable "[Mental Health Inclusion Ministry Planning Tool](#)". Used with permission of Key Ministry.*

Mental Health Myth Busters Graphics

Perfect for “May is Mental Health Month,” these graphics highlight common myths surrounding mental illness and the facts that bust those myths. We invite you to include these inserts in your bulletins and hang the posters in visible places during the month of May. Talking about mental health is the first step toward breaking the stigma associated with mental illness.

Week 1

[Click here](#) to download poster.

[Click here](#) to download bulletin inserts.



Week 2

[Click here](#) to download poster.

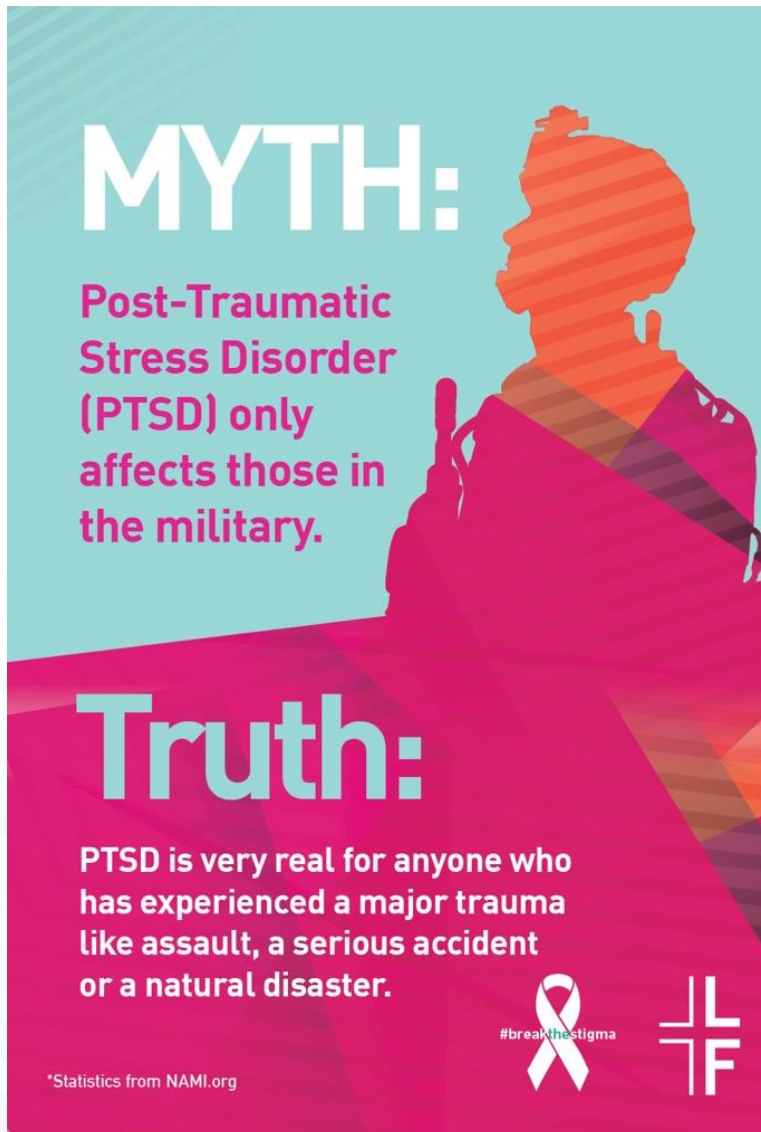
[Click here](#) to download bulletin inserts.



Week 3

[Click here](#) to download poster.

[Click here](#) to download bulletin inserts.



Week 4

[Click here](#) to download poster.

[Click here](#) to download bulletin inserts.



MYTH:

Psychiatric medications are “an easy way out” and only avoid dealing with the issue.

Truth:

For many with mental illness, medication is necessary, just like taking insulin is critical for a diabetic.

*Statistics from NAMI.org

#breakthestigma

LF

Week 5

[Click here](#) to download poster.

[Click here](#) to download bulletin inserts.



Prayers for Calming Anxiety and Other Mental Health Concerns

A prayer for soothing panic attacks

Dear God,

I come before You to lay my panic and anxiety at Your feet. When I'm crushed by my fears and worries, remind me of Your power and Your grace. Fill me with Your peace as I trust in You and You alone. I know I can't beat this on my own, but I also know that I have You, Lord, and You have already paid the ultimate price to carry my burdens.

For this I thank you, Amen.

—Author Unknown

A prayer for calming a troubled heart

Loving God,

Please grant me peace of mind and calm my troubled heart. My soul is like a turbulent sea. I can't seem to find my balance, so I stumble and worry constantly.

Give me the strength and clarity of mind to find my purpose and walk the path you've laid out for me. I trust your love, God, and know that you will heal this stress, just as the sun rises each day against the dark of night.

Please bring me clarity with the light of God.

In your name I pray, Amen.

—Author Unknown

A prayer for confronting fear

Heavenly Father, when I feel crushed by my own worries, lift my mind and help me to see the truth. When fear grips me tight and I feel I cannot move, free my heart and help me to take one step at a time. When I can't express the turmoil inside, calm me with Your quiet words of love. I trust in You, each day, each hour, each moment of my life. I know deep down that I am in Your grace, forgiven, and restored by your sacrifice. You have set me free. Amen.

--Author Unknown

Source: <https://www.womansday.com/life/inspirational-stories/g29613781/prayers-for-anxiety/>

A Celtic prayer of peace

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm; still me, Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease, enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

--Author unknown

Source: <https://www.womansday.com/life/inspirational-stories/g29613781/prayers-for-anxiety/>

A prayer for those living with the effects of trauma or other mental illness

Gracious and loving God,

You have walked with your people through fire and water. You have held their hand and felt their pain in the face of trauma and given hope even when there is no hope to be imagined.

We pray today for all those going through the valleys of life, those who feel that pain is breaking them apart and there is no tomorrow, those whose sadness covers everything, those experiencing mental health challenges.

We pray for the hurt, the crying, the hopeless, that in the midst of their pain you would be there, and your presence would be known.

We pray together for your gentle presence, for the still small voice of your love to be heard within the sound of sheer silence.

We pray that all who struggle on this day would hear the whisper of your love, saying, "I am here. You are loved. You are not alone."

And in the desert of pain, we pray that real hands, human hands, would give shape and substance to your love. We pray for people who can simply sit with those who grieve, weep with those who weep, hold the pain and the rage and the despair when it is too big for us to hold for ourselves.

May you, God of love and compassion, restore life where it is waning and hope where it is fading, as you brought life out of death in the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

--Author: Isabelle Hamley, used with permission.

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. (Psalm 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. (Psalm 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. (Psalm 23:4)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 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. (Psalm 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. (Psalm 63:7-8)

Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from all 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. (Psalm 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. (Psalm 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. (Psalm 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 for 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” card 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!

A Sermon on Mental Health

By Rev. Dr. Gary Zieroth
Associate Pastor – Ascension Lutheran Church
Fort Wayne, IN

“Bear one another’s burdens....” Galatians 6:2

Mrs. Johnson teaches second grade at one of our Lutheran schools. The second-grade student, Emma, has missed almost three weeks of school in total and it is only late October. When she is at school, Emma seems very anxious and fearful. She often asks to go to the office because her stomach is upset, or she has a headache. The teacher and principal call a meeting with the parents. Perhaps Emma’s fears and refusal to go to school is normal and understandable. The teacher and principal cannot tell whether Emma’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are normal or abnormal. Should Emma be referred to a psychologist or specialized counselor?

Robert, a Sunday school teacher at his local congregation has not worked at his full-time job for several months. His employer put him on unofficial sabbatical, waiting for his return. When he didn’t show up for a major sales appointment his boss found out that it was because he was intoxicated. Talking to Robert on the phone, the boss was repeatedly insulted, Robert started to cry, and he hung up. Does Robert need a substance abuse counselor or someone else?

Twice in his life, Pastor Schmidt has fallen into extended bouts of depression, which has required hospitalization and medication. His depression comes with persistent thoughts of suicide. His recovery has never been quick, but through the care that he received, and through the patience of his family, friends, and congregation, he has been able to fully recover and resume his pastoral duties. He is able to speak about depression in his sermons.

Even though these people believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, their lives are a mixture of family problems, suffering, shame, and different behavior. How should the church respond?

Mental illness is a frightening experience, not only for the one afflicted but also for those who witness the individual struggling to control unwelcomed thoughts and behaviors. In the United States about 1 in every 5 adults suffers with a mental illness in a given year.¹ For too long the church has struggled to minister to persons affected by mental illness, partly because a stigma surrounding it has remained strong, making mental illness a category of its own. It is too often regarded as some sort of peculiar affliction that is best dealt with by toughing it out, straightening up, or hiding any evidence of possible symptoms for fear of being judged or rejected, partly because many Christians find it hard to integrate mental illness into our understanding of the relationship between our bodies, minds, and souls and how each affects the other.

¹ “Any Mental Illness Among U.S. Adults,” *National Institute of Mental Health*, accessed December 1, 2022, www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-mental-illness-among-us-adults.shtml.

For too long the Church has interpreted mental illness as the result of someone's sin. Today we know much more about the human brain. We know that our mental health is physical health, and that diseases of the brain result not from sin, but from a complex web of causes such as environmental, hereditary, experiential, and other causes. The spiritual struggle comes when we, along with Paul in his letter to the Romans, call ourselves "wretched" even though God calls us "beloved." Mental illness often makes it harder to be confident in God's love because of ways that we view ourselves as something less than what God created; unconditional love can seem unfathomable. It needs to be made known by the Church that our sufferings related to mental illness are not punishments from God and are not the fault of our own moral or spiritual "failings." We need to know that all of us, are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), created in the very image of God (Genesis 1:26).

Scripture clearly describes how bodily illness is a consequence of life in a fallen world. The Bible contains many stories of Jesus' healing of the sick during his earthly ministry. Jesus gave very clear instructions to his followers about the need to include persons with disabilities in the life of the church so that the church can reflect the nature of his kingdom: "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14). Jesus challenged common understandings of disability and made clear that disability is a means through which Christ builds his kingdom, as he alludes to in John 9:1-3, neither the man born blind nor his parents sinned, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

God does and will use the gifts and talents of his children no matter how seemingly small or insignificant they may seem. Cora, a young woman in her late twenties who has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum, often blurts out words and can interrupt when someone is speaking. However, she often shows forth her strong faith in her Savior as she freely witnesses to his love. She is known to be one who reminds people to pray for many in the congregation. Nick, who is in his late 50's and lives with his mother, is a savant (one with an amazing memory). He is in church every Sunday sitting in his favorite chair in the back. He can quote at length Bible passages and remind pastors of their sermons preached many years ago. Even the very presence in church of someone who is struggling or suffering with a mental health issue can be a blessing to many as we worship together as one body and receive Christ's gifts for us.

Scripture contains a surprising number of descriptions of people with signs and symptoms associated with mental illness. Psalm 102 describes a man with weight loss, appetite disturbance, sleep disturbance, and social isolation (common signs and symptoms of depression), who turns to God seeking mercy for himself and for his nation. There is King Saul in 1 Samuel 16, who today would likely be characterized as someone with an obsessive-compulsive disorder, tormented by intrusive thoughts. His obsessions became increasingly severe as he twice attempted to kill David by hurling his spear at him (1 Samuel 18:10-11). In the opening chapters of 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul describes ministry troubles that led him to experience deep despair. Through this experience, Paul recognized two useful purposes in his suffering. His despair led him to increase his reliance on God while enhancing his ability to comfort other believers during their time of suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-9).

The task of the Church is not to cure mental illness (even though the church will help to find qualified and trained professionals for certain illnesses) but to address the legitimate spiritual needs of suffering people. Martin Luther's term *theology of the cross* means that God chooses to come to people through suffering. Mental illness is one kind of suffering through which God draws near to people. To those suffering with mental illness, the Church says, "Welcome! Welcome and be of good cheer. We do not think you are weak or damaged just because you are sick. Because here we know that we are like you – we are all sick and dying. "What a comfort to know that the members of his church do not look down upon him, but rather look at him as a fellow Christian, that is, an unworthy, sinful, loved child of God who has been redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The church is a sanctuary where we bear one another's burdens, where compassionate understanding is offered, and forgiveness is given.

Identity as a baptized child of God, community within the Body of Christ; stability based on our eternal hope in Christ; intimacy with God based on Jesus' incarnation ("God with us") – these are the medicines pastors bring. Mentally ill people are often receptive to these, since at the root of their lives they crave what God desires to give. Ministry to the mentally ill can be challenging, requiring long-suffering patience and wisdom.

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in depression, anxiety, loneliness, and substance abuse. The societal landscape today is enough to overwhelm any pastor or parishioner, but at the same time, the situation calls more than ever for the healing medicine of Christ's gospel. Only the gospel can heal the brokenness of the world and the brokenness of our lives. We all must have an invincible trust in the power of the means of grace. In God's Word and Sacraments are found the source of faith, healing, and eternal life, because the means of grace convey Jesus himself. Christ is the Lord of the Church. Through his suffering and death for you he will bring your faith to life and give you faith that will last throughout your life – especially in the midst of illness and suffering. Christ, who is the very source of life, gives life and hope to you.

The people of God are called upon to bear one another's burdens. Grace is the reality that the church needs to make evident through their willingness to bear with them their illness, while also helping people who suffer and for those who care for them, that God cares for them all. Pastor and people alike stand at the foot of the cross with those who are experiencing mental health issues as God, in His time, and in His way, raises that person back to life again. God give us the wisdom, discernment, and the love we need to help those whose sufferings Jesus took upon himself. In His name. Amen.

Prayer – "For those who are mentally ill"

"O Lord, merciful Father, sustain and comfort your servants who are mentally ill. Do not allow the evil one to trouble them, but provide them with people who, in wisdom and sympathy, will minister to them in their need. Strengthen them and their families in the knowledge of your redeeming love so that they may evermore look to You for rescue and help; through Jesus Christ our Lord.²

² *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006. Pg. 317.

Resources

Find help and resources from these national organizations 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 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/>



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.

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



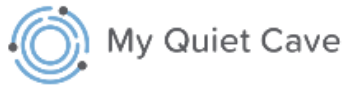
Mental Health Gateway is a comprehensive, faith-based mental health resource serving the Houston community and beyond.

<https://mentalhealthgateway.org/>



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/>



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



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>



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/>



Hope Made Strong is an organization dedicated to equipping leaders with the mental health resources needed to create resilient individuals and churches with knowledgeable and confident leadership.

<https://hopemadestrong.org/>



Full Strength Network is a nonprofit ministry created to strengthen Christian pastors and their families for their overall well-being. It is 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/>



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/>



RemedyLIVE helps create meaningful conversations about mental health through interactive educational experiences designed for congregations, schools, and business organizations. RemedyLIVE also connects people who may be struggling with their mental health with a trained Soul Medic who listens compassionately, offers hope, and shares resources that can help. Soul Medics are available 24/7 for text to chat conversations by texting 494949, Keyword: Remedy.

<https://www.remedylive.com/>



Living Compass provides resources, coaching, education, training and support to individuals, families, and congregations as they seek the wholeness God intends. Materials address eight inter-related areas of wellness, with a focus on faith. Most resources are free. Congregations may adapt the materials as needed to fit their ministries.

<https://www.livingcompass.org/>