

# Health Notes...

## Mental Health and Illness in the Christian Congregation



When we are caring for someone we love with a particular physical illness or disease, we want to learn as much as we can about that disease so that we might give our loved one the best care possible. Many around us are suffering with mental illness issues. How can we, as caring Christians, offer support, love, and resources needed by those with mental illness?

"Mental illness," says Susan Roberts, an author for "care-net/churches," "is like physical illness - it is not the results of a specific sin or weakness, but it is like asthma or dementia - it often just happens to people as part of the human condition, without them doing any specific thing to cause it." Just like with a physical illness, often the Church does not have the medical expertise to heal individuals struggling with mental health issues. But, as caring, concerned Christians, we can encourage members of our Family of Believers to seek professional help.

Stephen M. Saunders, Professor of Psychology at Marquette University, who writes about mental health in congregations, says that *"In a pew of five, one individual has been experiencing a serious depression. In a pew of ten, one suffers severe anxiety and another struggles with a trauma. Another row may contain an older couple who lost an adult child to suicide in the last year. A young woman, behind you, may be missing church often, because her child with severe autism makes it incredibly difficult for her to attend church. An elderly man or woman may worry about what will happen to their adult daughter with schizophrenia, when they are gone? Churches are wonderfully comforting to those with physical illness and to those whose loved one has died. May we offer the same comfort to those who are affected by mental illness."*

Saunders also shares research which shows that 1 in 5 adults, and 1 in 6 children will experience a mental illness in any given year. *"Over the course of a lifetime, 1 in 3 persons will be affected with mental illness. Anxiety, depression, substance issues and trauma-induced disorders account for most cases. However, less common disorders include autism, cognitive impairment, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. In churches with 500 members, in any given year, as many as 100 parishioners might experience a mental illness."* Every one of us is close to someone struggling with a mental illness. Mental illness is a family illness as it affects the immediate family, as well as, all those around an individual, who care deeply for them.

Following God's command of "Love one another," John 13:34, we can help others by seeing them, listening to them, consoling them, and suggesting trusted professionals in the community that might be of help to them. As our pastor does each Sunday, we pray for our congregational members. Our Health Cabinet and Parish Nurses share information about local mental health resources. Encouraging one another to speak compassionately about mental health issues as we do about physical health issues, and encouraging those affected to seek sound medical and supportive services, is the responsibility of each one of us, as caring Christians. Loving one another and pointing each other to our Christ, allows us to "Grow in Christ; Share His Love; and Encourage Others," as our Redeemer Mission Statement reads.

### Resources:

The Holy Bible

The Lutheran Witness. February 2023. Mental Health: A Lutheran Perspective

<https://www.care-net.org/churches-blog/mental-illness-how-can-you-help>