

Rev. Cindy Holtrop

Calvin Symposium on Worship 2018

**A10: Beyond Stigma to Hospitality: Creating a Gracious Space for People with Mental Illness**

**Definition of mental illness:** Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in thinking, emotion or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities. (American Psychiatric Association). Nearly one in five (19 percent) U.S. adults experience some form of mental illness. Approximately 1 in 5 youth aged 13–18 (21.4%) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point during their life.

**Definition of mental health—a state of well-being:** Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (World Health Organization)

**I. Why don't we talk about mental illness in worship/church?**

II. **Using appropriate language:** The language we use to speak about mental illness: person centered language: people with mental illness instead of the mentally ill. People with lived experience, peers. Refrain from using words: out of their mind, crazy, lunatic, wacko, weirdo, etc. Focus on words that are recovery oriented – the person has strengths, the ability to make changes in their life, gifts to offer the faith community. Avoid labeling.

**III. Ways that religion is a resource for people with mental illness**

Religion and spiritual practices can be a comfort, provide meaning, and be a source of coping for those with a mental illness. Harold Koenig in *Faith and Mental Health* describes a number of ways religion can help.

- a. Promotes a positive worldview
- b. Gives purpose and meaning
- c. Enhances social support
- d. Other ways: Koenig also mentions that religious beliefs and practices promote other-directedness, discourages maladaptive coping, helps to release the need for control, provides and encourages forgiveness, and provides hope (Koenig, 2005, 134-139).

**IV. Religion can also cause distress or be used inappropriately.**

**V. What can the church do to hospitably be a welcoming and faith nurturing community?**

- a. Organize a Mental Health Team (see [www.pathwaystopromise.org](http://www.pathwaystopromise.org), P2P)
- b. People need more than a friendly church; **they need friends.**

The **Way of Companionship:** Companionship asks us to walk “side-by-side” a person and to share the journey toward health and wholeness. Through the side-by-side presence and orientation and through participation in the other four core practices of companionship – listening, providing hospitality, “neighboring,” and expanding the circle of care – we become more acutely aware of a common humanity, of our experience of frailty and suffering, but also of the eternal significance of each human heart. (see P2P for training materials)

- c. Education about mental health, listening to the stories of people

- d. Speak with someone who has the lived experience of coping with a mental illness.
- e. Support groups:

**VI. Deepening and Widening our worship practices**

- a. Welcome/Call to Worship – As we gather to worship this morning, we come from various places and situations. We come with our anxieties, our doubts, and our fears. And God meets us where we are. God comes to us—offering us rest, hope and peace. Let us come to him.
- b. Confession and Renewal: Honest real confession, also recognizing ways we fail to see ourselves as God sees us. “Forgive us, O God, when we see ourselves with little value, when we wonder why you created us, and what you see in us. Remind us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that your love for us is long and wide, deep and high, that you will never let us go.”
- c. Songs we choose: that recognize the difficult side of life.
- d. Pastoral prayer: “Give patience and strength to all who live with physical and mental illnesses. Give hope to family and loved ones who walk alongside them.”  
“Loving God, you are always near to us, especially when we are weak, suffering and vulnerable. Reach out to those who experience mental illness. Lift their burdens, calm their anxiety, and quiet their fears. Surround them with your healing presence. Bless them with skills and strengths as they recover.”
- e. Sermons – general sermon on mental illness, people in the Bible who were in distress – Psalms.
- f. Litany: God our Creator, you give breath to each person you made. You treasure the gifts of each unique person. But when life becomes a burden rather than a gift, **God of life, hold us**. When darkness strangles the will to live, when days become endless nights, **God of light, shine on us**. When no one seems to understand, when we walk and wait alone, **God of love, embrace us with your presence**. Where there is despair, bring hope; where there is shame, give value and worth; where there is emptiness, bring fulfillment; where there is suffering in mind and body, bring healing. **God of hope, hear our prayer for life**. (C. Holtrop)  
*Prayer for Suicide Prevention Week (9/9-15/18), Mental Health Awareness Month in May:* God, we celebrate the gift of life for each person. We commit to nurturing the well-being of each person here. We know for some, life is a burden filled with suffering. Help us to talk about our fears, our anger, and our despair with someone we trust. We celebrate that life has purpose and meaning. For some, purpose and meaning are like dry bones, dead and lifeless. Remind us that You know us by name. You know our place and purpose in this world. We are created to live in community. Some feel alone, unloved and disconnected. Give us courage to reach out with love to someone who needs us. May we be Your presence with them. Teach us to be gentle and non-judgmental. We remember those who ended their life before it was time. Comfort those who grieve and bring healing. (C. Holtrop)

For additional worship resources:

liturgy <http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/faithhopelife/Christianity>

Includes prayers for faith, hope and life, mental health; litanies, sermon starters, songs (coming)

Sermon on Psalm 88: A Psalm for Realists not Optimists, Cindy Holtrop:

<https://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/psalm-88-psalm-realists-not-optimists>

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Greg Sinclair: <https://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/suffering-and-comfort-mental-illness>