Mental Illness: The Journey In and Journey Out
By Rev. Dr. Tim Ahrens

Various forms of mental illness affect at least 1 in 5 people in a given year. As a result, our church and family systems are deeply affected by mental illness. If one in five family members have been stricken with mental illness, the entire family is affected in one way or another. Either through full engagement of time, resources, or emotional energy or all three - most of our families are affected or some afflicted by mental illness.

In the face of this, the Church is sadly silent. Several months ago, I was with a group of Christians in a prayer group. One person shared how her daughter was battling bi-polar disorder. By the time our group finished sharing, 15 out of 17 people in the group shared that family members close to them - themselves, or their parents, children and/or spouses - had struggled with some form of mental illness. I asked, "Have you ever heard a sermon on this?" All 17 said they had NEVER heard their priest or pastor speak about mental illness from the pulpit. I promised that day I would address mental illness from at least one pulpit - our pulpit. I will offer five sermons on Mental Illness from August 7 through September 4. I invite you to have friends, family, neighbors or co-workers affected by Mental Illness come to church. Statistically that will be a lot of people.

Mental disorders are common in the United States and internationally. An estimated 22.1% of Americans ages 18 and older-about 1 in 5 adults-suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. When applied to the 1998 U.S. Census residential population estimate, this figure translates to 44.3 million people. In addition, 4 of the 10 leading causes of disability in the U.S. and other developed countries are mental disorders - major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Many people suffer from more than one mental disorder at a given time. In the U.S., mental disorders are diagnosed based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (DSM-IV).

Here are some more statistics on Depressive Disorders.

. Depressive disorders encompass major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, and bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is included because people with this illness have depressive episodes as well as manic episodes.
. Approximately 18.8 million American adults, or about 9.5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year, have a depressive disorder.
. Nearly twice as many women (12.0 percent) as men (6.6 percent) are affected by a depressive disorder each year. These figures translate to 12.4 million women and 6.4 million men in the U.S.
. Depressive disorders may be appearing earlier in life in people born in recent decades compared to the past.

Depressive disorders often co-occur with anxiety disorders and substance abuse. The challenge is the multiple diagnoses affiliated with depressive disorders.

There is hope. Medicine, counseling, and communities of support are available to us. Let's explore this together. I will offer five sermons on Mental Illness. In addition, I will offer a Book Study - "Blessed are the Crazy." Furthermore, NAMI of Franklin County is offering classes based in our church. They begin on July 10th. You are welcome to sign-up.
Here are the five sermons and dates...

August 7 - Communion Meditation - "When Mental Illness Hits: Out of the Depths I Cry to You" - Psalm 130

August 14 - "Depression: From the Pit of Despair We Can Rise in New Life" - Psalm 40:1-3 August 21 - "Mental Illness and God's Sufficient Grace" - II Corinthians 12:8-9


September 4 - Communion Meditation: "Hope for Today and Tomorrow: Not Easy But No Impossible" - II Corinthians 4:18

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