

# God of *All Comfort*

*Mental Health Resources for Church Worship*



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# Introduction

Statistics tell us that 20% of Canadians will experience mental illness in their lifetime. It affects all of us at some time, whether personally, through a family member, a friend or colleague. That means we share our pews with people who are living this experience. Yet, because of the stigma that surrounds mental illness and the culture of victory that pervades our places of worship, many who are affected by mental illness do so in silence.

As a faith-based organization, Communitas is inspired by Jesus Christ, to be a place of belonging, growth and contribution. We envision communities of fully human, interdependent citizens. Our hope is that people with developmental disabilities and/or mental health challenges can live full and rewarding lives and for those who identify as people of faith, that they can also participate fully in their places of worship. Communitas has served people living with developmental disabilities since 1974. We expanded our services to include support for people facing mental health issues in the 1990s.

In 2015, Communitas produced a worship resource in response to feedback that we received from pastors who were saying “we do not talk about this enough in our churches.” Working with pastors in our community, our own mental health program staff and people we serve, we created materials that would enable church leadership to talk about mental health challenges in the context of worship. The packet includes tools to use in worship: prayers, readings, a reader’s theatre, song suggestions, sermon prompts, children’s activities, stories, resources and more. There is great variety here, enabling you to use what you need in the context of your unique worship service. The materials have been widely used and we have received great feedback.

This 2018 edition includes an appendix of new materials so that those of you who have used this in the past can continue to use this resource to talk about this in the context of your worship services. Our continued hope is that this will help us create a space where people can talk freely and safely about the challenges they face as people of faith living with mental health challenges. We hope to remove the stigma that still exists around mental illness and provide church leadership with further resources to help you support everyone in your congregation towards mental wellness.

It is our prayer that this will be a rich and meaningful resource for you. Please use the feedback form found at the end of this package to share your thoughts, your encouragement and your constructive criticism with us. We value your input.

Peace to you,



Angelika Dawson

Communications Manager

Communitas Supportive Care Society

# Fast Facts about Mental Illness

## from Canadian Mental Health Association

### **How common is mental illness in Canada?**

It is estimated that 1 in 5 Canadians will develop a mental illness at some time in their lives. Many more individuals such as family, friends and colleagues are also affected.

### **What is mental health?**

Mental health impacts all aspects of one's life: social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental. At times, the balance may be tipped too much in one direction and one's footing has to be found again. Everyone's personal balance is unique and the challenge is to stay mentally healthy by keeping the right balance. Mental health is as important as physical health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". We believe that everyone must have good mental health, including people living with mental illness on a daily basis.

### **What is mental illness?**

Mental illness is the term used to refer to a variety of mental disorders that can be diagnosed. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alternations in thinking, mood, or behaviour (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.

### **Who is affected?**

Mental illness affects all Canadians at some time through a family member, friend or colleague.

- » 20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.
- » Mental illness affects people of all ages, educational and income levels, and cultures.
- » Approximately 8% of adults will experience major depression at some time in their lives.
- » About 1% of Canadians will experience bipolar disorder (or "manic depression").

### **What causes it?**

- » A complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors causes mental illnesses.
- » Almost one half (49%) of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem.
- » Stigma or discrimination attached to mental illnesses presents a serious barrier, not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to acceptance in the community.
- » Mental illnesses can be treated effectively.

Contact your local Canadian Mental Health Association office for information on resources in your community: [www.cmha.ca/get-involved/find-your-cmha](http://www.cmha.ca/get-involved/find-your-cmha)

# Materials for Worship

On the following pages are several resources for you to choose from as you plan your worship service. Feel free to use as many of these as you feel will work in your context.

## *Prayers & Readings*

### **Call to Worship** **from 1 Corinthians 12**

**Leader:** We are one body made up of many parts—the body of Christ.

**All:** **We were all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Greek, rich or poor, sick or well, young or old, depressed, manic or stable, homeless or comfortable.**

**Leader:** So if any of us says we are not well, we may be tempted to say we don't belong to the body of Christ, or feel like we don't belong.

**All:** **But we want to belong—and feel like we belong! We may be weak or even unpresentable. Please accept us and support us in our struggles.**

**Leader:** Please know that there are no divisions in the body of Christ. If one part suffers, we all suffer; if one part is honoured, we all rejoice!

**All:** **We have come to worship God as the body of Christ.**

› *John Konrad*

## **Prayer 1**

### **based on Psalm 139**

**Leader:** Let us pray

**All:** **O God of all comfort,**

**Leader:** You have searched me and know me.

You know my thoughts, my coming and going, when I rise and when I rest. You are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, you know it. You hem me in, behind and before. I am safe and secure in your presence.

**All:** **O God of all comfort,**

**Leader:** You are always present with me – there is nowhere that I can go where you are not.

Even when it feels that the darkness will overwhelm me, that the light of day will turn to night; I take comfort in knowing that the darkness is not dark to you, the night is like day.

**All:** **O God of all comfort,**

**Leader:** I find peace in knowing that you have been with me from the very beginning. You knit me together in my mother's womb, you know every hair on my head. You know all about me!

I know that your works are good, so I will give you thanks that I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

**All:** **O God of all comfort,**

**Leader:** You have searched me and know me, you know my heart. Take away my anxious thoughts. Take away anything within me that is hurtful. Lead me in the way everlasting.

Amen

› *Angelika Dawson*



## Prayer 2

Healing God,  
Thank you that we can come to you with all of our troubles and woes, knowing that you have overcome all this and more. Help us to remember that we are never alone, that you have promised us your presence and your peace. For this we give you thanks, Amen.

› *Angelika Dawson*

## Psalm 88

### A Litany Prayer for Help in Despondency

**Leader:** Let us pray

**All:**       **O Lord, God of my salvation,  
Let my prayer come before You;  
Listen to my cry.**

**Leader:** For my soul is full of troubles,  
I feel as though You have forgotten me  
Like I am cut off from Your hand

**All:**       **O Lord, God of my salvation,  
Let my prayer come before You;  
Listen to my cry.**

**Leader:** It feels as though I have been laid in the lowest pit  
I lie in the darkness, in the depths.  
I am utterly alone  
My friends turn away from me  
I am isolated, I feel trapped, I cannot get out

**All:**       **O Lord, God of my salvation,  
Let my prayer come before You;  
Listen to my cry.**

**Leader:** Lord, I call upon You daily;  
I have stretched out my hands to You.  
I look for your wonders in the darkness  
I long for your loving kindness  
I seek your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness

**All:**        **O Lord, God of my salvation,  
Let my prayer come before You;  
Listen to my cry.**

**Leader:**    O Lord, I cry out to You,  
In the morning my prayer comes before You.  
But it feels like You have cast off my soul  
Where are you, God? Why do You hide Your face from me?  
I am distraught!  
I feel like I am cut off from you  
I feel like I am drowning, engulfed in despair.  
You have removed lover and friend from me  
And my acquaintances are in darkness.

*(time of silence)*

**Leader:**    O Lord, I call upon you today, hear my prayer

**All:**        **O Lord, God of my salvation,  
Let my prayer come before You;  
Listen to my cry. Amen.**

*(Follow this prayer with these words of assurance from Lamentations 3:19-24)*

**Leader:**    Hear these words of assurance:

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.  
Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me.  
This I recall to my mind,  
Therefore I have hope:  
The Lord's loving kindnesses never cease,  
For His compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
Great is God's faithfulness, therefore, I have hope in Him.

› *Angelika Dawson*

## **Prayer of Confession**

### **based on Lamentations 3:19-24**

*(Upon hearing the words "Lord, in your mercy" the congregation will respond with "Hear our prayer")*

**Leader:** Loving God,  
Because you are kind, compassionate and faithful, we know that we can come before  
you in our weakness and confess our failings to you.  
Lord, in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer**

**Leader:** Merciful God,  
We confess that we do not always live our lives as a reflection of You. Forgive us for  
those times when:  
We have not been kind.  
We have not been compassionate.  
We have not been faithful.  
Lord, in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer**

**Leader:** Forgiving God,  
We confess that we have judged those who struggle with mental illness.  
We have judged because we do not understand.  
Forgive us for making assumptions. Forgive us for our indifference.  
Lord, in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer**

**Leader:** Healing God,  
Help us to be kind, to listen with open ears and open hearts.  
Help us to be compassionate, to respond with open hearts and open minds.  
Help us to be faithful, to walk alongside our friends, with open minds and open hands,  
Lord in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer**

**Leader:** Generous God,  
Your loving kindness never ceases,  
Your compassions never fail, they are new every morning

Great is Your faithfulness

We give You thanks for these gifts and commit ourselves to live as those who have received your forgiveness and grace, faithfully sharing these gifts with each other.  
Lord in your mercy

**All:** Hear our prayer

**Leader:** Amen

› Angelika Dawson

## **Responsive Reading** **based on Lamentations 3**

**Leader:** God invites us to HOPE...

**All:** Even in my affliction and wandering?  
Even with my bitterness and disappointments?  
Even when my spirit is cast down?

**Leader:** Yes, even calling all this to mind, God invites us to hope!  
And God calls us to FAITH...

**All:** Thank God, we have not been consumed by the darkness;  
God's compassions never fail; they are new every morning!

**Leader:** And God calls us to SALVATION...

**All:** I will wait for God, who is good; I will wait patiently.

› John Konrad

## **Benediction 1**

We know that there is trouble in the world around us. We know that for many, there is trouble within: trouble in our hearts, trouble in our minds. But as we leave this place of worship, take heart! Be at peace! For we go with Jesus' promise that He has overcome the world. Amen.

› *Angelika Dawson*

## **Benediction 2** **from John 1**

Brothers and Sisters, go in peace!

Let us receive the light of Christ, for it is through this light that we have become children of God.

Go into the new week being witnesses to the light that has come into the world in Christ Jesus.

Let us remember God's promise, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the evil!"

To God be all the glory, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen

› *John Konrad*

## Poetry

The following poems have all been written by people with lived experience of mental illness. These poems can be used as readings at any time in the service or as illustrations in the context of a sermon.

The youngest poets are Lyndon (18) and Tyron (20) Brown—brothers who live with anxiety, a by-product of living with dyspraxia, a neurological disorder that affects motor processes including the production of speech. Although they are mute, their poetry is articulate and shows their deep faith in God. Tyron has published a book of writing called *Big Changes Some Day*.

Michael Lundberg is a former client of Communitas' Supported Independent Living program. His self-published poetry book *Solidarity Street* describes his journey with anxiety and depression.

Angelika Dawson has a family history of anxiety and depression and has had periods of lived experience as well. Prose is her preferred form of written expression but she appreciates the discipline of writing in poetic forms such as the Haiku piece contributed here.

### His Strength

As patiently He takes my hand  
Eternal strength is mine to stand  
Obeying His word there is joy in my soul  
Power over weakness which seems to control  
This body is feeble but His strength is sure  
True to His promise, both constant and pure  
He will not falter though I stumble and fall  
Power He gives me to overcome all  
The omnipotent God is my saviour and friend  
He's walking beside me and will to the end.

› *Lyndon Brown*

## Peace

The peace my soul is looking for  
Oh can the Lord his peace restore?  
The river ever flows in love  
From His eternal throne above  
Through sorrows pain and fears that storm  
The character of strength will form  
Patience through the seas of life  
Peace He gives though there is strife  
The way can seem too hard to chart  
But can He not His love impart?  
In realms of spiritual thought His grace  
Is given my fears to fight and to face  
Ocean's waters are deep and dark  
But His light the shore will mark  
The Heavenly shore is where there's rest  
Our haven in one who knows what's best  
And so with hope in God's great love  
I center my eyes on Heaven above  
My lot in life may have its pains  
But His strength always remains  
There through the comfort of His word  
The promise of His help is heard

› *Tyrone Brown (written the week Tyrone was in hospital with issues of anxiety and medication problems)*

## Mental Compartmental

Does mental illness touch you?  
It could be true  
One in four  
How can we ignore?  
I walk the streets  
I will not admit defeat  
I see it everywhere:  
The homeless, the isolated  
The depressed, the lonely  
I hope that people care  
Enough to help  
Can we cope with our problems inside?  
I don't really see why  
I cry  
Every day of my life  
Because I suffer  
Am I normal? Are you?  
What can I do?  
Care! Because I do!

› *Michael R. Lunberg, from Solidarity Street, aspects of Mental Illness*



## Tense

### String Haiku, Philippians 4:4-7

Past experience

Affects my present day, night  
Threatens my future

I want to live in

The present, the here and now  
But without the tense

Do not be anxious

But pray and ask God for help  
Giving thanks to God

And the peace of God

Will guard your heart and your mind  
Those places of tense

Leaving the past there

Living the present, today  
Giving God the rest

› *Angelika Dawson*

## *Dramatic Reading*

### **based on Psalm 32**

**Reader 1:** I am thirsty.

My body thirsts for healing.

My mind thirsts for peace.

My soul thirsts for comfort.

**Reader 2:** As the deer longs for the water,

So my soul longs for You, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God

**Reader 1:** I cry out.

My tears have been my only food, day and night

I pour out my soul

**Reader 2:** Why? Why are you in despair, O my soul?

Why are you so disturbed within me?

*(pause)*

**Reader 3:** *(almost a whisper)* I put my hope in God,

I know that I will praise Him again—

Praise Him for the help of His presence

*(pause)*

**Reader 1:** I am thirsty.

My body thirsts for healing.

My mind thirsts for peace.

My soul thirsts for comfort.

**Reader 2:** O my God, my soul is in despair within me;

Why? Why are you in despair, O my soul?

Why are you so disturbed within me?

*(pause)*

**Reader 3:** *(almost a whisper, slightly louder)* I will look deep within, deeper. And remember.

I will remember the Lord

I will remember His kindness in the daytime

I will remember His song in the night. And pray  
I will pray to the God of my life

*(pause)*

**Reader 1:** I cry out.

My tears have been my only food, day and night  
I pour out my soul  
I say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me?"

**Reader 2:** Why? Why are you in despair, O my soul?  
Why are you so disturbed within me?

*(pause)*

**Reader 3:** *(louder)* I put my hope in God,  
I know that I will praise Him again—  
Praise Him for the help of His presence!

*(pause)*

**Reader 1:** I will not thirst forever

**Reader 2:** I will not despair forever

**All:** I will put my hope in God

› *Angelika Dawson*

# Sermon Prompts

The following “Sermon Prompts” are designed to help those who are preparing a sermon for a service focused on mental health. These were prepared by Pastor Leonard Klassen from King Road MB Church in Abbotsford, BC, Angelika Dawson, Communications Manager at Communitas and a fourth resource, a prepared sermon, is offered by Pastor April Yamasaki from Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, BC.

## Sermon Prompt 1

**Title:** A Gentle Whisper

**Text:** 1 Kings 19:1-18

**Introduction:** The scriptures are full of amazing narratives of people of faith accomplishing amazing things through God’s strength. Yet, scripture also gives us glimpses into the daily human reality of some of these heroes of faith. Elijah is one of these. For all his “prophet success,” Elijah found himself at a point of deep despair, begging God to take his life (19:4). What might we learn from how God responds to Elijah that helps us when we too face despair?

### Sermon Points:

- » No one is exempt from fear and despair (1-4a)
  - There can be a tendency to hold others up to unattainable standards, resulting in a feeling of aloneness when dealing with fear and despair. But this isn’t the case. A key point to remember is that God is faithful.
- » Don’t forget about the basics of life (5-10)
  - Food and rest. We know they are important, but they are often treated with less priority than advisable. A lack of physical rest and physical nourishment can be a significant contributor to fear and despair.
- » Practice gentleness when dealing with mental health issues (11-14)
  - God heard Elijah’s cry and responded, yet his response wasn’t in the wind, the earthquake, or even the fire. His response was in “a gentle whisper.” Elijah knew God’s power (see chapter 18), but perhaps needed to know God’s gentleness much more. This passage shows God’s comfort and support to Elijah during this valley. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalms 46:10) Take time simply to be with others in quietness, without having to solve their issues. Don’t try and rush to a quick-fix solution (whether for yourself or for someone else); much of the healing process will be in the journey.
- » No one is alone (15-18)
  - In a time of despair, a feeling of utter aloneness can be common. “It’s only me.” “What’s wrong with me?” Yet, this text reminds us that we are not alone. God gave Elijah a glimpse

into this fact. This might be a good place to consider a testimony or two from those who are on their path toward mental wellness. Some testimonies are included in the resource materials (see page 24) but even more effective would be to find someone from your congregation who would be willing to share his/her own story.

## Sermon Prompt 2

**Title:** Take Heart

**Text:** John 16:29-33

**Introduction:** In the gospel of John, this passage marks the final words of Jesus directed toward his disciples before his crucifixion (chapter 17 begins Jesus' high-priestly prayer). The final verses mention "trouble" and "peace", as well as "take heart" and "overcome." These are a fitting group of concepts that might very well describe the realities of those who are working toward mental wellness.

### Sermon Points:

- » Explore how scripture uses words such as peace, comfort, and trouble
  - There are some good insights in the previous chapters (13-16) that help tie together this concluding passage
- » Consider some supporting passages that further highlight the juxtaposition of these concepts
  - Philippians 4:4-7
  - Romans 8:37-39
- » Issue a practical invitation to respond:
  - Take heart! (Don't give up!)
  - Grasp onto Jesus. Though our relationship with Jesus doesn't mean we won't suffer, the bottom line is that Jesus has overcome the world. Even when times are the darkest, call out to Jesus (see Psalm 13 as an example). Christ-followers aren't immune from mental health issues but stubbornly clinging to Jesus in the midst of despair is valuable.
  - Walk together (in contrast to being scattered). The temptation is to withdraw. The temptation is to shun. Work against both extremes and walk together.
- » Illustrations and Aids:
  - The musical group Casting Crowns wrote the song *Praise You in the Storm*. Research the story behind this song. Learn more at [youtube.com/watch?v=MNnF7FjZ5po](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNnF7FjZ5po)
  - Commission several people to try and "draw" the connection between the concepts of peace, joy, courage, trouble. Use these as ways of highlighting the relationship.
  - Brian Doerksen's song *You Shine* includes the words from John 16:33. Incorporate it into the worship set or the sermon.

## Sermon Prompt 3

**Title:** Guarding your heart and mind

**Text:** Philippians 4:4-9

**Introduction:** When Paul wrote this letter, it's not likely that he was addressing people with debilitating mental illness. He wrote while under house arrest in Rome to thank his friends in Philippi for their kindness to him. He was writing to encourage the church in Philippi, to stand firm in the face of their own persecution. Paul encourages his friends to pray, to focus their thoughts on positive things and to learn from him and each other. There is much that we can draw from these words as we talk about mental health – both as people living with mental health challenges and those offering support.s.

### Sermon Points:

- » This text can seem to come across as trite: “Don’t worry, be happy! Just think positive!” Acknowledge this at the beginning and use stories from real people that can attest to the real power of each point. If you or people from within your congregation do not have lived experience, use the stories included in this material or the videos online to help you.
- » Pray (4-7) – Paul’s encouragement is very specific: pray, petition God, make your requests known, but remember to be thankful. Notice that he doesn’t say “pray, petition, be thankful and when God answers your prayers exactly as you wanted them to be answered, then you’ll experience peace.” It is the act of prayer itself – the petitioning and the listening, waiting, trusting – that begins the journey towards peace that guards your heart and mind.
- » Think Positive (8) - For someone dealing with anxiety, negative thoughts come unbidden but just as with feelings of anxiety, it is what you do with it that matters. For some people who experience psychosis, it requires medication and extensive counseling to turn those thoughts around. It can be very hard to be intentional about focusing one’s mind away from the negative towards the positive but it makes a difference when you do.
- » Learn from others (9) – Look for people who have lived your experience and are now in a healthy place; learn from them. If you are one of these people, share your story so that others can benefit from your experience.
- » The passage from Philippians is really focused on being more than doing: be joyful, be gentle, be in prayer, be thankful. If you are in this state of being, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Use the To Be Lists included in this material to support this point.

**Additional Sermon Support** – On her blog *Writing and other acts of Faith*, Pastor April Yamasaki (Emmanuel Mennonite Church) shares her sermon *One way your church can stop hiding Mental Illness*, delivered at Emmanuel on May 3, 2015. <http://aprilymasaki.com/2015/05/04/one-way-your-church-can-stop-hiding-mental-illness/>

## Children's Feature

Mental health is a big topic to address with children, especially in the context of a worship service. There really isn't enough time to address it in a comprehensive way. The feature below is geared for different ages and is intended as introductory pieces that acknowledge that mental health challenges exist in some families and offer very simple ways for children to talk about them. These features focus on depression/anxiety (feeling blue or sad) as it is an easier concept for children to grasp.

### For Children Ages 4–9

#### Materials

- » Hearts cut out from blue construction paper to give to children at the end of this feature.

#### Introduction

Ask the children some or all of these questions:

- » Have you ever heard someone say: I'm feeling blue today? What does it mean to feel blue?
- » Have you ever felt blue/sad?
- » When you feel sad, what makes you feel happy again?
- » How can we help someone when they are feeling blue?

Take note of the suggestions that children offer: a hug, a smile, hold their hand, say a prayer with/for them, bake some cookies and bring them by, whatever it is that they share.

#### Explanation

Tell children that everyone feels sad from time to time. Sometimes, people feel sad for a very long time. They can't stop crying or their sad feelings make them so tired that they feel like they need to sleep all the time. They don't eat properly. When that happens, people sometimes have to take medication or they go and see a special person called a counselor who helps them talk about what is making them sad and helps them to find ways to feel happy again.

#### Take Home

Give each child a blue heart and ask them to write a word on it or draw a picture on it that would make someone feel better (have one prepared that you can show them) ask them to give it to someone they know who might be feeling sad. Then you can say: Whether someone feels sad every once in a while or whether someone feels so sad that they need to see a doctor, everyone can use a hug or a smile (or whatever the children have suggested) that will remind them that someone cares for them.

Close your time with a prayer.

## For Children Ages 10-13

The same questions can be asked of older children but the answers you receive may be a little more elaborate. The suggestions to help make someone happy may also reflect their ability to think with more complexity.

The take home could also be more elaborate. If there is a children's church during the service, try a more elaborate craft—make a flower out of yellow and blue hearts and a popsicle stick and write sad words on the blue hearts and happy words on the yellow hearts, alternating them on the stick—a way to get kids talking about emotions and recognize that we all have happy and sad feelings and that's okay.

## Children's Books

Talking to children about mental health can be a challenge, in particular if the children in your congregation are very young. There are several children/youth oriented books listed below. These would be wonderful to offer to parents or caregivers who are looking for ways to talk about mental illness with children of all ages. A common theme in these materials is the reminder that children are not at fault when a parent experiences mental illness, nor are they responsible for the care of their parent.

### **Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry**

*By Bebe Moore Campbell (2003, Putnam and Sons, New York) ISBN: 0-399-23972-3*

A short, illustrated story about a young girl who lives with her single mom, who has mental health challenges. The story shows how the girl gets support and shows how she and her mother maintain a loving relationship.

### **Our Aunt Gracie**

*By Jacqueline Woodson (2002, Jump at the Sun/Hyperion Books for Children, New York)*

*ISBN: 0-7868-0620-6*

A short, illustrated story about a brother and sister who are abandoned by their mother and go to live with her sister, Aunt Gracie, who helps them to understand their mother's mental illness.

### **How to be a Real Person (in just one day)**

*By Sally Warner (2001, Alfred A. Knopf, New York) ISBN: 0-375-80434-X*

A chapter book for older readers (middle school) about a young girl whose father has left to live in another city because of a job promotion and so she must care for her mother who is living with depression. The girl does not ever have friends over, but she carefully observes her friends and TV ads so that she can learn how to behave like a "real" person. The book comes to a dramatic, but uplifting, ending



### Meeting Miss 405

By Lois Peterson (2008, *Young Orca Readers, Victoria BC*) ISBN 978-1-55469-015-2

A chapter book for young readers. Set in Surrey BC, this story follows Tansy, whose mother has gone to a treatment clinic because of her depression. As a result, Tansy and her father are coping alone. After school, she goes to stay with Miss Stella, an eccentric old lady who lives in suite 405. Miss Stella teaches Tansy the value of being mindful to help calm her own anxiety.

### You Are Special

By Max Lucado, (2000, *Good News - Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois*) ISBN 978-1581342192

A picture book for young readers. This book was not written specifically about mental health but emphasizes that we need only care what God thinks of us, not what others do. This might be helpful to children who are experiencing or who have family members experiencing mental illness and the stigma that often accompanies it.

## Arts Ideas for Worship

- » Have the children, youth, or the whole congregation draw a picture as the sermon is being spoken—if there are thematic words (take heart, peace in the storm, etc.), have them focus on those words and create an art piece. Display these drawings in the weeks after the service.
- » Have an artist in your congregation create an art piece on stage while the sermon is being spoken.
- » Have an artist in your congregation create an art piece on stage while a piece of music is being played or a song is being sung—something that connects to the theme of the service.
- » In the weeks leading up to the service, invite people from the congregation to submit art pieces on your chosen theme—drawings, sculpture, banners, quilting, collage—whatever medium they choose. If possible, ask them to include a short write-up that describes their piece. Display this artwork in your foyer or sanctuary on the day of the service and/or photograph each piece and create a slide show to use in the context of your service.
- » Ask an artist to create a special bulletin cover for your mental health awareness Sunday.
- » Invite the musicians in your congregation to compose a music piece based on the scripture text(s) being used on that Sunday. Have it sung or teach the song to your congregation during the service.
- » One of the resources in this material is poetry. Invite the poets in your congregation to write a poem or short story on your theme and include it in the service or in worship services to come.
- » Have a dramatist in your congregation write a short play on your theme.

## Song Suggestions

### Congregational Songs – Contemporary

- » I Lift My Eyes Up – by Brian Doerksen
- » Faithful One – by Brian Doerksen
- » Will You Love Me in Winter? – by Brian Doerksen
  - Lyric and chord charts for Brian’s music can be found at [briandoerksen.com](http://briandoerksen.com)
- » Approach – by Ray Klassen, [reverbnation.com/rayklassen](http://reverbnation.com/rayklassen)
- » Still – by Hillsong United
- » To Be Content – by Bryan Moyer Suderman, [smalltallmusic.com](http://smalltallmusic.com)
- » Blessed Be Your Name – by Matt Redman
- » Good to Me – by Vineyard
- » Remind Me Who I Am – by Jason Gray

### Congregational Songs – Hymns

- » When Peace Like a River
- » O Love That Will Not Let Me Go
- » Longing for Light We Wait in Darkness
- » Healer of Our Every Ill
- » Help Us to Help Each Other Lord
- » O Love That Will Not Let Me Go
- » Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?

### Other Songs for Encouragement and Comfort

#### Casting Crowns

- » Praise You in This Storm – [castingcrowns.com/music/lyrics/praise-you-storm-0](http://castingcrowns.com/music/lyrics/praise-you-storm-0)

#### Shiyr Poets

A project of Brian Doerksen and friends focused completely on the Psalms. Doerksen recommends “In the Bereavement” from *Volume One*, co-written with Dorothy Peters, a member of Highland Community Church and professor at Trinity Western University. Learn more at [shiyrpoets.com](http://shiyrpoets.com).

#### Cathy Hardy

Information about Cathy Hardy’s ministry can be found at [cathyajhardy.com](http://cathyajhardy.com)

- » Courage for Today – [youtube.com/watch?v=OUF5SVLCs1M](https://youtube.com/watch?v=OUF5SVLCs1M)
- » Breathing Together – [youtube.com/watch?v=ycVRKZA7eqA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ycVRKZA7eqA)

## More Worship Resources

### **Leading in Worship**

Carol Penner is a blogger who writes worship materials for all occasions and makes her materials available to the public. View her resources on mental illness at [carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/mental-illness](http://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/mental-illness)

### **re:Worship**

Christine Longhurst hosts this extensive resource both writing and gathering worship resources from all over the world. The blog is very well indexed making it easy to search by topic or scripture text. Visit [re-worship.blogspot.ca](http://re-worship.blogspot.ca)

### **CommonWord**

Mennonite Church Canada and Canadian Mennonite University has worship resources focused on mental health issues both for download and for borrowing. For mental health worship resources visit [commonword.ca/go/63](http://commonword.ca/go/63) and for other resources (like DVDs and full curricula) visit [commonword.ca/go/64](http://commonword.ca/go/64)

# Mental Health Stories

Scripture is filled with journey stories. Indeed, our faith is enriched when we share stories from our journey. This is especially true when we experience difficult times. Sharing stories about mental health journeys can be a way to encourage others, raise awareness and reflect. Below are mental health stories in print and video that can be shared as part of a worship service.

## Amelia

### Living with 'Invisible' Illness

If you were to pass Amelia walking on the street, you'd never guess. Her sunny smile lights up a room. She invites you in with the warmth of her personality. Her demeanour is one of confidence. Her handshake is firm. So you'd never guess. Never guess that she has struggled with mental illness.

"Mental illness is an invisible one," Amelia explains. "You can't tell just by looking at someone that they may have experienced severe mental illness. That's why, every chance I get to tell my story, I'm excited to do it. It's an opportunity to raise awareness. Mental illness can affect anyone."

Seven years ago Amelia was what many might call a typical—if over-achieving—young woman. She was in school full time working on her counselling degree. She worked two jobs while doing her internship. She volunteered at a Christian camp on weekends. Things were going well, but self-care was not a priority.

Looking back, Amelia says she struggled with depression even as a teenager but she dealt with it by keeping busy. She had what she calls a "small breakdown" five years ago and has had ups and downs here and there but it was after graduating from college that things became "a little too good."

"I stopped sleeping. I started having what I thought were spiritual experiences—'signs and wonders,'" she says. "Then the voices and messages started getting dark."

She began to have severe anxiety and lost touch with reality—there are whole periods of time that she doesn't remember. Her family sought help for her and she was admitted to hospital, with psychotic depression. It was here that she had to confront her own misconceptions and fears about mental illness.

"I didn't know what 'psychotic' meant. I asked my mom if it meant that I was now in danger of killing people," she recalls. "But as I met other people just like me, I came to realize that this is just an illness—it's not a statement about who I am or my character."

Amelia felt like her mind had betrayed her. It took a long time to trust herself again. In the hospital, she felt scared, like she had no voice.

"None of my accomplishments or anything else about my identity mattered," she says. "I was just 'psychotic girl!'"

After a month in hospital, she moved back in with her parents, thinking she'd have a couple of weeks of transition and then just be back to 'normal'. Her case manager gave her a reality check, reminding her that it took a long time for her to get where she was and the road to wellness would also be a long one.

"I basically slept for a year. It took a long time to start rebuilding my life. I had to start from scratch," she says.

She was subsequently diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. Being labeled is both a blessing and a curse. An accurate diagnosis means you can get the specific help you need to begin the journey of recovery and live well. But living with a label can also be discouraging because people make assumptions when they hear terms like "psychotic depression" or "bi-polar." Just as people wouldn't suspect by simply looking at her that she's experienced mental illness, Amelia also doesn't want people to make assumptions about her when they learn that she does.

"We're people who have personalities, who have hopes and dreams. We're capable people," she says.

For Amelia, the shift of focus from illness to wellness made the difference. Part of her recovery happened as a result of her connection with Communitas Supportive Care Society and their Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). WRAP is a process by which people learn to identify what makes them well and then gives them tools to maintain wellness. Amelia saw people facilitating this process who had lived her experience and were living full, healthy lives. It gave her hope.

"Before I came to WRAP I wondered if this was it, would this be my life now, was I done?" she says. "I didn't have a perspective on wellness or recovery. WRAP gave me that perspective."

Now Amelia works as a Peer Support Worker (PSW), walking alongside others who are beginning their journey to wellness. She loves the opportunity she has to give back and offer hope to others. She recommends Peer Support to anyone wrestling with mental illness.

“Connecting with someone who really understands where you are is both comforting and reassuring,” she says. “As a PSW, I can also share things that will help a person manage those dark times.”

Today, Amelia is in a much better place. She knows what her triggers are and has a plan in place if things get challenging again. She knows that she is not alone. Amelia hopes to return to school one day and complete her master’s degree in counselling. She is grateful for the support she has around her, especially her family that has seen her through the whole process and loved her unconditionally.

Sharing her experiences with others, raising awareness and supporting people on the journey to wellness gives her own history with mental illness some meaning. She knows that she offers a unique perspective and because of that, she can be an encouragement to others.

“For anyone out there who is struggling with mental health issues I can honestly say there is hope,” she says. “It may be dark now but it can get better.”

## Wally

### Living Life More Fully

Wally Nickel lives with anxiety and depression. Looking back now, he says he was probably living with this throughout his youth and young adult years but simply didn’t recognize it. Even when he reached burn-out as a young pastor, he simply chalked it up to the stresses associated with ministry.

“I thought I just needed a change, so I went back to school,” he remembers.

He completed his master’s degree from Fresno Pacific Bible Seminary, where he met Sylvia. The couple married and Wally re-entered pastoral ministry. They would become parents when they adopted a son in the fall of 2004, then a daughter two years later. In the midst of all of this, he had his first significant encounter with depression.

“It hit me out of the blue,” he says. “Something wasn’t right and for the first time I couldn’t figure out if this was physical, mental or spiritual. I didn’t know what it was or where it was coming from.”

When it wouldn’t go away, he visited his doctor who prescribed medication, which helped keep him stable.

Then came a Saturday morning in April 2012.

"I have a vivid memory of it," he says. "We were all in the kitchen, I was doing the dishes and we were talking about what we were going to be doing that day. All of a sudden I had a wave of panic that totally paralyzed me. I turned to Sylvia and said, 'I can't do this.'"

That panic attack began a long journey with mental illness. Over the course of that year, he spent time in hospital, took several months off work and met with various mental health professionals. Even so, it took a long time to pinpoint what it was that was causing the panic and anxiety.

"Because I am a pastor, they kept trying to pin it on my work but I knew that wasn't it—at work I felt calm and at peace," he says.

It wasn't until he was introduced to Michelle Ferguson, an occupational therapist (OT) and began meeting with her that he finally began to get some answers.

"Michelle helped me to uncover the causes of my anxiety and panic attacks," he says. "She was also a Christian and was able to help me from a Christian perspective which was a real gift."

Through his sessions with Michelle he began to recognize a brokenness in his relationship with his dad. Wally is quick to emphasize that his dad is a good person and genuinely did his best to be a good husband and father.

"He was a great provider and we were always safe and well-cared for. But it was my mom who was the emotional provider, not dad," Wally says. "For others that wouldn't be a problem but because I am the kind of person I am, I really needed that from him and he couldn't give it."

Wally recognizes that in many ways he has a good father/son relationship—they can talk about almost anything, just nothing on a deep, emotional level.

"I don't ever remember my dad saying that he loves me and I don't remember ever saying it to him. It was assumed but it just wasn't something we said to each other. There's 47 years of patterns and habits established there," he acknowledges. "But I'm grateful that dad has also grown and is able to express his love for my children. He's on a journey too."

Being part of a support group also helped Wally to realize that he was not alone. Sometimes he'd come to a meeting with things to share, other times he wouldn't say a word and simply listen to the other members of the group.

"Being part of these supports for 6 months changed my life forever," Wally says. "It was a privilege to be part of it."

Today, Wally is serving at Coast Hills Community Church and has found it to be a very supportive and encouraging work environment. He has been open about his mental health challenges and

has been welcomed and accepted. Even so, he feels that the greater church is not doing enough to address the stigma around mental health.

“Mental illness is surrounded by shame. We don’t want to talk about it and we wish it would go away,” he says. “But mental illness is just like any other disability or illness and we need to equip ourselves as church leaders to help our congregations be truly accepting, welcoming places.”

Wally encourages people to be open and compassionate, willing to listen and not judge. He says that sometimes, people of faith who are wrestling with mental illness need others to carry them on their journey.

“Be a friend. There were many times that I needed people who believed what I believed, who would not only walk with me, but sometimes walk for me, people who could point me back to the God who loves me,” he says.

Wally is learning to let go of anxiety and trust that God loves him, deeply. He’s learning to love himself, something he says is harder than anything else he’s ever had to do. As he learns these things, he knows he’ll be able to love others more fully. He has accepted that this his experience with mental illness is not situational, this is something he will live with for the rest of his life. He is grateful for the people who have come alongside him—his wife and children, his family, people in the medical community and people his church—who are helping him live his life more fully than ever before.

“This has impacted my whole life but I’m grateful that I am where I am,” he says. “I’m on a journey of surrender and it’s a beautifully challenging place for me to be.”

## *Tyrone & Lyndon* **Treat Others as Yourself**

It can be very frustrating when people make assumptions about you. People might treat you a certain way because they perceive you to be something that you are not. What we don’t always realize is how that treatment might impact a person’s mental health.

Tyrone and Lyndon Brown know what it’s like to be judged, to have people assume that they are less capable than others, that they are not intelligent or that they have nothing to offer. These assumptions have had an enormous impact on their mental health. The anticipation of being misunderstood can lead to severe anxiety, something they have to manage on a daily basis. At times, the anxiety has been so high for Tyrone that he has been hospitalized.

The brothers live with global dyspraxia, a neurologically based, developmental coordination disorder that affects fine and gross motor skills. In the case of Tyrone and Lyndon, it also affects



speech. Both are non-verbal and it is because of this that people assume they are developmentally delayed.

But when you read their poetry, it's clear that Tyrone and Lyndon are intelligent, insightful and articulate people. Both have won Commonwealth essay competitions. Tyrone has a book of published writing titled *Big Changes Some Day* that includes both poetry and prose. Their parents, Melody and Trevor, are understandably proud of their children but they are equally frustrated by the constant misunderstanding that their boys have to live with and the anxiety it causes them.

The boys entered elementary school labeled as “moderately mentally challenged.” They spent their days in special needs classrooms, outside of mainstream education. It wasn't until Ruth Casanova, Tyrone's speech and language pathologist, began working with him that it became clear that he—and Lyndon as well—had been given a label that didn't apply.

“Ruth discovered that Tyrone could read,” Melody says, explaining how Ruth would put word cards in front of Tyrone and he'd point to the correct words. “We tried it at home too and realized that he'd been reading and understanding far more than we had ever imagined.”

While this discovery, and learning how to communicate with a keyboard, opened new worlds for their boys, being at school was most often a frustrating experience. Melody ended up home schooling her children, which improved both their education and their well-being. Even so, Tyrone and Lyndon continue to face discrimination. As a parent, Melody says it is hard to witness the many ways in which her sons are misunderstood. It has been most hurtful when this misunderstanding has come from people in the medical community—the very people who she thought would best understand their situation. She recalls a visit to a pediatrician who ignored Tyrone even though he was sitting right beside her. He then told Melody that Tyrone was “mentally challenged” and no amount of medication would help him.

“Tyrone instantly became uncontrollable and we had to remove him from the office,” she says. “Looking back, it is very clear that Tyrone was insulted and was fighting against a label that he considered unfair—and was unfair.”

Tyrone and Lyndon communicate by writing and their creative pursuits have become a way for them to express their deep emotions and their strong faith in God.

Tyrone wrote the poem “Peace” while he was in hospital after an episode of anxiety. Lyndon's poem “His Strength” was written earlier this year (see both poems below). Both poems show a remarkable ability to see beyond the physical and emotional pain they experience and to express their belief that God gives them the strength they need to live with it. Melody says her sons' faith has also been inspirational to her.

“They are a gift. This experience has made me humble and made me realize my utter dependence on God,” she says. “If we hadn’t had faith, I don’t know where we’d be. The Lord has kept our marriage strong, given us love for our children, given us strength. Where else would I get that?”

The family attends Langley Gospel Hall and Melody says the boys love to go. It is a safe place where they feel acceptance. As parents, Melody and Trevor have also felt supported and cared for by their faith community.

“When Tyrone was in the hospital, people from the church called us and brought meals to us,” she says. “It was so nice to know that someone was listening and that they really cared. I can’t express how much that meant to me.”

When asked what advice she would give to people in the pews about how they can support families like theirs, she says that people should take time to listen and not be afraid to be honest.

“Don’t pull back. When someone is going through a difficult time—whether it’s mental health or physical illness—people need to be understood, not shunned,” she says. “The person going through it needs support and so does their family.”

For the Brown family, their faith in God, their family and their church community has enabled them to accept their realities as a blessing.

“We have seen answers to prayer, there have been things in our lives that we can only say have been orchestrated by God,” she says. “We have faith that no matter what, God will work it out.”

## Leonard

### **A Journey Through Burnout**

Almost 4 years ago, Leonard ran full steam into the brick wall that is often referred to as “burnout.” He was not expecting this at all. At times his journey felt hopeless, at other times there were glimmers of hope. He remembers it clearly: it was Tuesday, June 7, 2011. His heart was racing, he felt faint—as though he wouldn’t be able to keep food down. It scared him.

“But in typical male fashion, I drank some water, put my head down for a bit and waited for the feeling to go away,” he says.

Two days later it happened again, right before a staff meeting at the church where Leonard serves as a pastor. This time, he broke down and could not control his emotions. While the staff prayed, Leonard was rushed to hospital where medical staff ruled out heart issues and diagnosed stress. A visit to the family doctor confirmed it: burnout—what Leonard has heard defined as “the double whammy of anxiety and depression.”

"In hindsight, there were some clues that I was heading toward a crash," he says. "I hadn't slept well in months. Simple things became overwhelming. Any little thing my young boys would do could set me off and cause immense frustration. At times I would find myself sitting at my desk and simply not knowing where to start—despite a long list of things to do."

His doctor ordered three months off of work to rest and receive regular care from a counsellor. At first Leonard couldn't believe the length of time off he was being asked to take. He thought he might need a week, but three months?

"Everything in my Mennonite upbringing chafed at this," he says. "I thought people would think I was a wimp! Yet, looking back, I see how three months wasn't long enough."

In reality, it took five months to begin a gradual return to work. The first several weeks of his leave were spent sleeping and escaping in novels. Though he has been a passionate hockey fan for 30 years, he didn't even care that the Canucks lost in the Stanley Cup finals. He had no energy to contribute to anything in the home or towards the care of his children, leaving him feeling guilty that his wife, Bonnie and other family and friends bore the burden of everyday tasks and responsibilities.

"Through my interactions with my doctor, I discovered that we all have an imaginary line in our lives that distinguishes between our reserves and our energy. When we drop below it, we dip into our reserves," he explains. "This happens to everyone, but I was in a place of having dropped below that line so regularly that I bottomed out. I could no longer function properly."

In many ways, the journey isn't over. Even though it's been four years since his breakdown, Leonard knows that he'll live with the realities of depression for the rest of his life. He still sees his doctor and counsellor regularly, though not as frequently. He's re-learned the value of exercise, of daily time for reflection, of letting go of things that he can do nothing about. Leonard believes that these steps are making him a calmer, gentler, more patient person, husband, and father. He also recognizes that he could never have recovered on his own.

"The support of my family, my church, and my doctor and counsellor all worked together to assist me on my journey toward mental wellness," he says. "My church really went above and beyond to walk with me on this journey."

Today, Leonard is mostly doing well. Like most of us, some days are better than others. He has embraced the need to care for himself, scheduling regular physical activity and still meeting with his counsellor.

"I work hard to give my burdens to God and let go of things I can't solve. One of the most difficult lesson for me to learn is that I can't fix someone else's problems. I find myself taking much more time to listen, and much more time to reflect," he says. "I try to remember every day to practice

grace toward myself. I've been amazed at how God has opened the door for me to walk with many others who are struggling in a similar fashion—not as an expert, but rather as a fellow pilgrim.”

When asked if he's fully recovered he'd like to say that he's at 90 percent, but he has come to understand that 100 percent isn't the goal. Instead, he says that he is learning what it means to be patient, to walk humbly with God and to be sensitive to the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

“I am more convinced than ever that God is faithful,” he says. “Do I still struggle as I look ahead and see the unknowns? Yes. Am I still more tired than I would like to be at times? Yes. At times, I have to stop, take a deep breath, and verbalize my trust in God. At other times, I need to simply take a quick nap. These things help me live out my trust in God as I know that He is faithful.”

*Leonard is an associate pastor at King Road MB Church in Abbotsford, BC where he has served for over 15 years. He is married to Bonnie and they have 2 elementary school aged boys. He loves to read, enjoys cycling and walking, and loves the interpersonal nature of vocational ministry.*

## Videos

These two short videos can be used as part of your worship service. Each video tells one person's journey with mental illness, what they learned and what they do now to stay healthy.

**God of All Comfort: Amelia Kent's Story** (3:45) – Amelia shares her journey towards mental wellness. She talks about her breakdown, the long journey towards wellness and how medication, exercise, diet, and positive people all help her maintain her mental health now. “I love my life,” she says.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-S7sxPjjGg>

**God of All Comfort: Leonard Klassen's Story** (3:35) – Leonard talks about how a panic attack revealed that he was living with burnout and anxiety. He shares how his family, his colleagues and his church helped him return to his pastoral work. “We need each other,” he says.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAQmu\\_2zV\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAQmu_2zV_o)

# Bulletin Insert

The two-sided bulletin insert on the following pages provides congregants with a take away to encourage further thought about mental health. So often caught up with our “to-do” lists, this insert offers a “to-be” list for when we are struggling with mental health challenges and for when we are offering support.

While the insert is double sided, it’s important that we don’t think of ourselves as being one or the other: either needing support or giving it. We are both. Those of us with good mental health who are able to offer support, also need support and to take care of our mental health. We’re not only mental health caregivers. We also need to receive care. And those of us who are struggling also have gifts to offer, and can contribute to the mental health of others. As one woman discovered sharing her own story of depression was both healing for her, and also an encouragement to the mental health of others.

It is important to remember that these are suggestions – you may have other ideas that can be added to each list. It is also important to remember that this is NOT a checklist to complete – if you are really wrestling with your mental health, then it may be enough to simply Be Willing – to ask for help from friends, family, community or health professionals.

*Note: Bulletin inserts are sized to 5.5 inches wide by 8.5 inches tall, a typical size for many church bulletins.*

# To Be List

## for when you can offer mental health support

- 1. Be a Listener** – take the time to be quiet and listen when someone shares their experiences with you.

*“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”*  
James 1:19 (NIV)

- 2. Be Open** – it takes courage for someone to share their journey with mental illness. Be open and non-judgmental as you listen.

*“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* Matthew 7:1-2 (NIV)

- 3. Be a Friend** – put yourself in the shoes of the person: how would you like someone to be there for you? (eg. make meals, baby-sit, go for a walk, go fishing, other practical support)

*“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”* 1 Peter 4:8-10 (NIV)

- 4. Be Patient** – this is a journey, with hills and valleys. Celebrate the successes, be sensitive to the challenges.

*“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

- 5. Be an Advocate** – for those you support, in our community and also by presenting your requests to God.

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

# To Be List

## for when you need mental health support

- 1. Be Willing** – to ask for help from your friends, family, community and professionals when you need it.  
*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Matthew 7:7 (NIV)*
- 2. Be Courageous** – it takes a lot of courage to be vulnerable but courage also multiplies: when you share your story, you give others the courage to share theirs.  
*“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9 (NIV)*
- 3. Be Honest** – sharing your reality will allow you and others to better understand the challenges you face and enables others to offer their help when you need it.  
*“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32 (NIV)*
- 4. Be Self-Aware** – know what your strengths and weaknesses are and find ways to use your skills in your community.  
*“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” Romans 12:3 (NIV)*
- 5. Be Content** – give yourself grace, keep track of and appreciate the little steps you take toward wellness day by day.  
*“... for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”  
Philippians 4:11 (NIV)*

# Resources for Pastors

Resources to support people in your congregation living with mental health challenges:

## **Communitas Supportive Care Society**

*CommunitasCare.com*

Communitas has served people living with developmental disabilities since 1974. We expanded our services to include support for people facing mental health issues in the 1990s. Communitas provides a wide range of services to meet the needs of those who are at different places on their road to recovery including residential care, transitional living, drop-in support groups and more.

## **Sanctuary Ministries**

*sanctuary-ministries.com*

Walking alongside churches to help create awareness about mental illness. This organization provides resources for churches and support groups for people living with mental illness.

## **Canadian Mental Health Association – British Columbia**

*cmha.bc.ca*

Works to promote the mental health of British Columbians and support the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. This is done through advocacy, education, community-based research and services.

## **Anxiety BC**

*anxietybc.com*

Works with experts to increase awareness, promote education and improve access to current, evidence based resources on anxiety. Anxiety BC has many free of charge, self-help, downloadable resources to support management of anxiety for youth and young adults, adults, new mothers, and children.

## **British Columbia Schizophrenia Society**

*bcss.org*

Works to bring compassion and hope and to improve the quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia and psychosis.

## **Mental Health Commission of Canada**

*mentalhealthcommission.ca*

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is a catalyst for improving the mental health system and changing the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians around mental health issues. Their website has a number of excellent articles and also referrals for offices in your area.



**Mood Disorders Association of British Columbia**

*mdabc.net*

A non-profit organization that provides treatment, support, education, and hope of recovery for people living with a mood disorder or other mental illness. They build awareness and understanding in communities throughout the province, reaching out to as many people as possible. Join a support group, learn more about mental illness, and take positive steps towards recovery.

# Feedback

*God of All Comfort* is a new resource offered by Communitas Supportive Care Society. We would like to gauge the usefulness and relevance of this resource, and value your feedback. Please take a few moments to let us know what you think. Be honest in both your praise and your constructive criticism!

- 1.** Tell us how you used this material. Did you build the entire service around the theme, just a segment, or did you use the material outside the service? What components did you use? Why?
- 2.** Of the components that you did use, which were most meaningful/helpful?
- 3.** How did your congregation respond?
- 4.** What could be added or changed to make these resources more complete?
- 5.** Any other feedback you'd like to share with us?

Please send your feedback to Angelika Dawson at [adawson@communitascare.com](mailto:adawson@communitascare.com)

# Appedix of New Materials

## Call to Worship - Based on Psalm 31

We come to worship this morning, seeking refuge in God who is our rock and our refuge. Let this be a safe place, where all can come and find comfort, healing, guidance and love. Let us place our trust in the Lord, in whose presence we can hide. For the Lord is faithful to those who cry out and call for help. So be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord. Come, let us worship God who is our rock and our refuge.

› *Angelika Dawson*

## Prayer of Lament and Words of Assurance – based on Psalm 31 & 34

**Leader:** Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My strength fails because of my affliction, my bones grow weak.

**People:** Sometimes I feel as though I have been forgotten, as though I am dead, I have become like broken pottery

**Leader:** But I trust in you, O Lord. My time is in your hands. Let your face shine on me and save me in your unfailing love

**People:** Hear my cry for mercy. Hear my cry for help. Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress. You are my help and my deliverer, O Lord. Do not delay

**All:** Amen.

### Words of Assurance:

**Leader:** Hear these words of assurance: Be strong and take heart all of you who hope in the Lord. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

› *Angelika Dawson*

## **Prayer of Lament and Words of Assurance – based on Psalm 5 & 6**

### *Prayer of Lament*

**Reader 1:** No, Lord! Don't punish me in the heat of your anger.

**Reader 2:** Pity me, O Lord, for I am weak. Heal me, for my body is sick,  
and I am upset and disturbed.

**Reader 1:** My mind is filled with apprehension and with gloom.

**Reader 2:** Lord, in your mercy.

**Congregation: Hear our prayer.**

**Reader 1:** Come, O Lord, and make me well. In your kindness save me.

**Reader 2:** I am worn out with pain; every night my pillow is wet with tears.

**Reader 1:** My eyes are growing old and dim with grief because of all my enemies.

**Reader 2:** Lord, in your mercy.

**Congregation: Hear our prayer.**

**Reader 1:** Listen to my words, Lord, consider my lament.

**Reader 2:** Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

**Words of Assurance:**

**Reader 1:** I will take comfort, for the Lord has heard my weeping and my pleading.  
He will answer all my prayers!

**Reader 2:** Let all who take refuge in you be glad, let us ever sing for joy.

**Reader 1:** Spread your protection over us, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

**Reader 2:** Oh Lord, we rejoice for in your mercy.

**Congregation: You have heard our prayers. AMEN.**

## Words of Assurance

### **“Encouragement” based on 2 Corinthians 1:**

God is the ultimate source of all compassion and comfort,  
And as God comforts us in all our troubles,  
We are enabled to comfort those in their troubles  
With the same comfort we have received from God.

Just as we experience the sufferings of Christ,  
In the same way the comfort we receive from God  
Overflows into the lives of others who also suffer.

As we experience distress together,  
It can also lead to your comfort and salvation.  
As we experience comfort together,  
It can produce patient endurance in you as well.

So our hope for you is firm,  
Because we know that as you share our suffering,  
You also share our comfort.

› *John Konrad*

### **“Benediction” from Colossians 3: 12-17.**

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

› *John Konrad*

## “Prayer and Thanks for Salvation” based on Psalm 22

Dear God, why do I feel you have forsaken me?  
Why do you feel so far away?  
It seems my prayers are not being heard.  
I pray night and day, but hear no reply?

I want to acknowledge that you are there.  
People throughout all ages have put their trust in you,  
And you brought deliverance,  
They trusted in you, and were saved.

There are times when I feel unworthy;  
Times when I feel belittled by others  
Who mock me for trusting You,  
Saying, Why doesn't God send you deliverance?

I feel surrounded by evil,  
I feel parched, and my heart is weak,  
I feel my strength is waning,  
And the enemy surrounding me on all sides!

Dear God, come near to me and deliver me.  
Be my strength and help me.  
I will declare your salvation,  
I will praise you with thanksgiving.

› *John Konrad*

## Sermon Prompt 4

**Title:** Mental Illness and the Body of Christ – prepared by Pastor April Yamasaki

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 12

**Introduction:** 1 Corinthians 12 paints a beautiful picture of the church as a body with many parts that need one another, with many gifts that work together. For a church struggling with division and competing rivalries (1 Corinthians 1:10-13), this vision was an invitation to look beyond their differences. As we consider the challenge of mental illness in our day, it can also help us to look beyond any labels and differences to imagine a healthy way of relating to one another.

**Sermon Points:** Key verses appear in brackets below, but be sure to pay attention to the entire flow of this chapter with its vivid details of hand, foot, eye, and ear. Rather than a list of do's and don'ts, the text offers a word picture to spark our imagination.

- » As the body of Christ, the church is made up of many members (verse 14), some of whom live with mental illness. According to the Canadian Mental Health Organization, 1 in 5 Canadians experience some kind of mental health problem.
- » Mental illness may tend to isolate individuals and families, but the body needs of all its members (verse 21). Even those parts of the body that may seem weaker are actually indispensable (verse 22). Great contributions have been made throughout history by people who experienced major mental illness, such as artist Vincent van Gogh, writer Virginia Woolf, Nobel Laureate in economics John Nash.
- » Instead of division or isolation, the different parts of the body are to have equal concern for one another (verse 25). This includes extending compassion, care, and prayer for one another.
- » This also means the genuine give-and-take of friendship. People are not "projects," but if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (verse 26). We are members of one another.

## Poetry

### **I am Cancer. I am Mental Illness**

The mere mention of my name strikes fear into people's hearts.

*Yes, and perhaps also some confusion.*

I can take many different forms.

*So can I; each one is a separate disease.*

I am somewhat unique to western cultures in modern times.

*I am there too but they used to think of me as demon possessed.*

I cause great suffering, pain, and heart-ache.

*Sadly, I do as well.*

I am no respecter of persons. I strike the rich and the poor alike; it makes no difference.

*You can add race, religion, and Jesus in your heart; I do not discriminate either.*

I affect friends and family and all people around those who have me.

*Ditto.*

My treatments are long and arduous and sometimes worse than the disease itself.

*Unfortunately, that goes for me too; learn to live with me for the rest of your life.*

I can take over a person's entire body.

*I can do that; and then I mess with their very identity.*

I can be terminal; people die because of me.

*Sorry, me too.*

People have run across Canada for me, and millions of young and old raise millions of dollars for research through public events and big name celebrities.

*Hmmm, most celebrities who have me are no longer celebrities and there's very few fundraising campaigns for me.*

I'm on every church and Facebook prayer list.

*I prefer to suffer silently and remain hidden.*

I'm part of a title: Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre.

*I'm the psych ward at the back of the hospital.*

People all feel sorry for my victims.

*They just think mine are crazy.*

I can be beaten.

*I can carry stigma to the grave.*

› Gareth Brandt



## I am crow

*The world speaks:*

You crow.

You garbage-eating blackmuscle heart.

How the filth speckles your beak!

Look at your reflection in your shining vomit, you oily creature! Look at your home or can't you see the black mold through your nightfilmy eye—how grotesque you are! You'd eat our puke, wouldn't you, if you were hungry enough?

You crow.

You villainous plotter, planning planning.

Take your sinshadow elsewhere, twisted gargoyle! Don't land your crooked claws on this pristine pavement! We take care of our own, so back! back! you cretinous creature!

Don't spread the lies of your past!

You gargled no mothersmilk, you egghatched reptile, no god coddles you, so back! back!

You crow.

You think yourself clever, don't you, with your nutcrackering and busybodying, but no intelligence comes out of your lipless daggermouth, no sentience, just emptiness.

You cry!

You crow!

You scream!

You witchcackle!

You occult darkspirit! Wiccan demon! Corpse defiler! Back! back!

You crow.

*The poet speaks:*

You crow.

You shining spirit, let not darkness in.

You wear it on your back, already inked, let not it seep into your soul. But crow,

I know it lies already heavy there.

I know, my crow, the darkness sits inside your being, crushing deathwish whispers through

your veins. You gorgeous wing! How light you look,  
how delicate upon that outcast bed,  
spread featherswide, so beautiful and young.  
Don't open, oh carved obsidian beak, don't speak:  
I see the suffering around your shape,  
the acid trash, the crumpled life, the blood,  
the dead facade, the living one, but crow,  
I know that you have precious human veins,  
I know they map a labyrinth too vast  
to fit within you; too exquisite, too  
complex, to carry only wasted blood.  
You crow, your blood is full of pain and loss,  
is coloured by the refuse of the world  
that you've absorbed, but crow, you know your blood  
is history and future, diamond  
and earth, and flows through all the flesh of life?  
You crow, how beautiful and wonderful,  
misunderstood and crucified.

You crow.

*The crow speaks:*

I am crow.  
I am crow.  
I am crow.  
I am crow.

› *Adriel Brandt*

## The Garden.

See morning dawning, flowers yawning  
In springtime's wakeful glory,  
Each blade of grass upturns to your face;  
You watch in beauty of sunlight on wind.  
To feel you pass, to know the longing,  
To brush your cheek and tell you  
I love you, but I cannot smile.

See soft hues and dainty dews  
Embellish invitations to rejoice:  
They pile in crisply scented papers by my door  
With words too water-stained to read  
As in a rush the March parades march by  
With trumpet calls trilling the rebirth of green;  
I soak my feet each morning searching  
For songs that fade as I make to follow.

Where is there morning alighting in me?  
What if I wait a polar night awake  
With eyes cast east, still sunlight never came?

You tucked the secret to peace of mind  
In the tulip folds and petal skirts  
Of many layered peonies:  
How many flowers must I tear apart  
With shaking hands to find nothing?  
I grow gardens full of frail leaves  
That never withstand a fall of rain,  
What colours could grow from the compost of these?

› *Mackenzie Lee*

## **Everyday Psalms: A trip toward mental wellness.**

Dear God,

Why won't You help me and lift me out of these doldrums of depression? I lie curled up on the couch too tired to make the effort to go for a walk or to have a shower. My heart cries out to You to lift me out of these feelings which drag me down into the depths of despair. I can't write. I can't see where you want me to go. The words won't come and shake me loose from this agony of defeat. All I ask is to feel Your Presence and to relax in the warmth of Your arms. Gracious God, please help me to grow.

Oh Perfect Father,

I long for your peace to reside inside my heart. I am full of anguish and fear. I wish You could just place your hand upon my shoulder, turn me toward You and gather me into Your everlasting arms. I am struggling with invisible bands that surround me and prevent me from reaching up to You. I know that You are there, waiting, but my fear holds me in restraint. Help me to trust. Untie the knots, and I will come running to You. Thank you for listening to my cries. I know my strength lies in You. Gracious God, Help me to grow.

Dear Loving God,

I am anxiously awaiting your presence to rescue me from the emotions which engulf me. I find it hard to sit still, to relax. I am trying to cope with the thoughts which pursue me. They chase around my brain like cat and mouse; the mouse trying to find any safe place to hide. Until the mouse finds a home the anxiety continues to chase the thoughts. I stop to think on Your presence. A smile rests cautiously upon my face. For just fleeting moments I dare to believe. Am I nearing home?

Dear Gracious God,

I am trying hard to face these feelings and accept that they are part of the illness. It is difficult to believe that the emotions will all pass and that I will feel better in time. When I am in the middle and the thoughts are so overwhelming; they take on names and faces and then I feel that no one loves me. I think that I am weak. I struggle to be on top of these feelings and wrestle them to the ground. I am a child of God and therefore I am loved. He loves and understands me. The rest will come. Loving Father help me to grow.

Dear Creator God,

You remind me so often of what love is. The snowflake that is so unique and yet so fragile. You have created each and every one. We see Your love in the sunshine. We see Your love in the rains which wash the dust from the air and cause the fragrant flowers to grow. All these things and much more are the product of a wave of Your hand. We humans must try to be aware that Yours is the perfect plan and not do acts which destroy the simple balance of nature. You created the first beautiful butterfly so delicate and yet so protected in its' cocoon until its beauty is ready

to be presented. These are the treasures which are freely given. We are the gardeners of the world. Help us to appreciate and protect it in all its' glory.

Dear Mother Creator,

I want to climb upon your lap and nuzzle my face into your breast. I want to feel your calmness infusing into my heart and soul. You are the only one who can fade away my anxiety. You see me as I am, weak, frightened and searching. I long to feel your breath which infuses into me the hope of serenity. I pull down the mantle of your gown and rest my face against your warm soft skin and I am promised peace.

Dear Abba Father,

You have come into my life to bring joy and hope. I don't know the path which we are taking but You are the leader on the tandem bike that we ride together and the thrill and excitement that I feel shivers me to my core and makes me hold fast. You know all. You know every dip and hill. I ride in anticipation. Sometimes I am afraid but I trust You and I know that these fears are just reminders to hang on. I love You.. I want You to search out the path because the trip makes me want to snuggle closer to You. Love is a grand experience. It takes the ordinary out of everyday life. It helps us to see Your Spirit in the tiny flower and the lofty mountain. Take me through my life on your shoulders and teach me to expand my perimeters. Take me through my tears of laughter and sorrow and help me to grow.

My True Goal,

I am well. I do not have Heart Disease or Cancer. My blood tests have all been good. I must concentrate on living each day in the positive and not let negative thoughts run me over. I must exercise every day and enjoy my life. My doctor says I Look good. My daughter says I look good. I will instantly erase each negative thought as it comes into my mind. I am of value. I am loved. I will fight this battle and with God's help, I will win.

› *Kathleen Monteith*

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