

# Mental Health and Wellness:

Worship Resources for All



United Church of Christ  
**MENTAL HEALTH™**  
**NETWORK**



UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST



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# Introduction

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**Welcome to: Mental Health and Wellness Worship Resources a collaboration between The United Church of Canada, the United Church of Christ and the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network.**

The sacred stories of our faith traditions offer us hope and encouragement for everyday life. When it comes to mental health and wellbeing, we invite you celebrate the power of faith to positively influence the mental health of our communities. New brain science confirms what our ancestors knew: God's love has healing power. For emotional, social, and mental wellbeing, faith assures of two protective factors: (1) you are not alone and (2) you are loved.

In today's world, this is a message that faith communities are uniquely positioned to share. We invite you to include in your worship services these mental health and wellness resources because in doing so, you are providing critical spiritual care for the flourishing of God's people.

Spirituality is an essential part of a holistic approach to mental health and wellness. As the writer of Revelations says, God is the Alpha and the Omega, God is with us in the beginning and in the end, no matter who we are or what our mental health diagnosis or where we are on life's journey." God promises to be our God and God is creating a new heaven and a new earth. God shows us all compassion and unconditional love, wiping away every tear from our eyes.

We pray these worship materials will bless you and your faith communities. Thank you for being

part of a global movement of God's healing Spirit and for sharing hope with people living with mental health challenges, often invisible, yet very real and painful. Coming together to break the silence in worship services, we help end the stigma and shame of mental health challenges. Thank you for creating beloved communities where we can share honestly about our mental health and where we can share God's love with one another.

## **The United Church of Christ Mental Health Network (UCC MHN)**

**Bishop Allyson Abrams, PhD, D.Min.**  
UCC Mental Health Network

## **The United Church of Canada**

**Rev. Dr. Alydia Smith**  
Network Coordinator, Church in Mission Unit  
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## **The United Church of Christ**

**Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, MSW, M.Div., D.Min.**  
Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice  
United Church of Christ, National Ministries

**May is Mental Health Awareness Month. The United Church of Canada celebrates Mental Health Sunday the first week in May. The United Church of Christ celebrates Mental Health Sunday the third Sunday in May.**

# Prayers for Faith Leaders

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## I. **A Prayer for Leaders in Faith Communities**

We recognize,  
God of all life,  
all people, all places;  
that many of us continue to not understand  
issues of mental health—  
our own, and that of others'.  
For so many broken reasons  
stigma is placed upon folks  
living with mental health difficulties,  
building walls of isolation,  
rather than the support and love  
of beloved community;  
the support and love  
of radical belonging;  
the support and love  
that Jesus exemplified,  
over and over and over again.

Open our hearts, open our arms,  
open the ways to knowledge  
and comprehension—  
that all your beloved children  
would find safe home, here.  
Now.  
Always.

We ask this in the name of the One whose hands and heart always reach out,  
Jesus, the Christ.

Amen. *(The Right Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, Moderator, United Church of Canada)*

# Prayers for Faith Leaders

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## II. A Prayer for Clergy through the Time of Pandemic

Creator God of all that is good, my heart sings in praise of your majesty and wonder. In love you created me; in love you sustain me.

Your breath animates me.

Your wisdom enlightens me.

Your arms enfold me.

Your eyes witness the suffering I hide from others, while you remain attentive to the sound of my silent tears.

I am called to care for others, as Jesus himself did.

I accept that call, waking every day fully aware of those who long to experience the solace only you can bring.

Day in and day out, I give myself to those whose needs I am called to meet.

I do it even when my body is exhausted, my spirit flagging, my resolve thin, my humor all but absent, my capacity for love diminished by the enormity of it all.

Help me.

Heal me.

Uphold me.

Sustain me.

Renew me.

In seasons of grief and trauma, through times of toil and tribulation, during days of long-suffering and sleepless nights, be thou my vision. Let me see with new eyes what hope speaks of: the new day of our awakening to a season in which every tear shall be wiped away, every sorrow erased, every evil overcome, every death become a resurrection.

May it please you to renew within me the joy of having accepted your call to show the world the power of your love to quiet all fears, forgive all sin, heal all wounds, repair the wounds of injustice, endure all suffering, diminish all anxiety, and transform self-doubt into self-love.

I pray this in the name of Jesus, the one you sent to incarnate your love and who abides with us through his Holy Spirit.

*Amen (Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ, National Ministries)*

# Prayers for Faith Leaders

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## II. Prayer of Lament for Faith Leaders

*(As we prepare this resource we are especially mindful of faith leaders and have prepared this prayer for you.)*

God of Grace and God of Mercy, we thank you for life. We thank you for the value of life.

God we confess that we are discouraged and feel weary in well-doing.

We have watched over your people, we have prayed for your people, we have eulogized your people, we have stood with them and have grown weary.

God we confess that we aren't sure about ministry and the call to lead your people.

We have been wounded by your people, we have been verbally and emotionally abused by your people, we have been disrespected by your people, we have been traumatized by your people and have decided to walk away from your people.

God we confess that we are low in spirit and need you to lift us.

Watching all the deaths of persons during the pandemic, watching all of the political

posturing during the pandemic, watching the polarization of people and politics, watching morals and values diminish, we need to see your power and your might that can bring about a change.

God we confess that our families have been disturbed and even destroyed. Our livelihoods have been changed forever. Our faith has fluttered. Our love has been torn. Our trust has been tested. And we need you to heal and restore like only you can.

God forgive us for our unbeliefs. Forgive us for our moanings. But there is a wailing in our spirit and we must cry before your throne of grace. God hold our tears in your hands. Hold our hearts near yours. And keep our spirits so that when this is over, we can be like the phoenix and rise to our next.

Continue to watch over us. Don't allow us to destroy ourselves and our people with our brokenness. And bless us in mighty marvelous ways as we all work towards healing and wholeness.

Our prayer we lift to you in Jesus Holy Name. Amen *(Bishop Allyson Abrams, PhD)*

# Call to Worship

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I. One: We gather in the presence of the One who breathes life into all of Creation.

**All: We sing God's praises, breathing in God's glory.**

One: All are welcome in the presence of the Most High.

**All: We come, seeking the goodness in the hands of God.**

One: We gather as God's beloved people, leaving no one outside.

**All: Together we reflect the fullness of God's love; together we bring God's love into the world.**

One: Let us worship the Living God whose breath gives us life. *(Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe, based on Psalm 104)*

II. **Call to Worship**

One: Come, let us worship God who is creating a new heaven and a new earth. Today is a new day, a fresh start, and a day of new beginnings.

**All: Come, let us worship God who creates peace out of chaos, calm out of anxiety, and hope out of despair. Even when we are depressed, we trust God is with us.**

One: Come, let us praise God who chooses to be among us, one of us, a Disabled and Neurodiverse God dwelling among us living with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, brain disorders, and neurodiversity.

**All: Come, let us praise God who says to each one of us, "no matter who we are or what medications we take or our diagnoses or where we are on life's journey: I will be your God."**

One: Come, let us give thanks to God who promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes.

**All: Come, let us give thanks to God who loves us so much that death, mourning, crying, and pain cannot stop God from loving us. This is our greatest hope: we are held in God's love.**

Everyone: Come, let us rejoice, for God, the Alpha and Omega, is making all things new! *(Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund)*

# Call to Worship

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III. One: We gather in the presence of the One who abandons no one.

**All: Come Holy Spirit, our advocate and comforter.**

One: All are welcome in this sacred place, made holy through your presence with us.

**All: Open our hearts and minds this day, guide us into a loving relationship with all your children.**

One: We gather as God's beloved people, leaving no one outside.

**All: Spark us with a word of life and radical belonging—a message that we share with others as we seek to live out Christ's love.**

One: We call on the name of God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us.

**All: Amen.** *(Rev. Amy Petré Hill)*



# Invocation/Opening Prayer

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I. Holy One, be with us in this sacred space. Stir your Spirit in and among us as we offer our prayers and praises. We long to hear more than the groaning of Creation around us, more than our own fearful groaning. From the places deep within us, that we mistakenly believe are hidden from you, may your Spirit intercede for us. Draw us into your presence. May we recognize you in ourselves and in our neighbors. Let us see you through all brokenness that we may find wholeness in being your body here and now. In the name of the One who fills the world with Hope. Amen.  
*(Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe, based on Romans 8)*

II. One: O God, come into our place of worship this day and enliven us.

**All: Come into each heart, each story, each prayer, each song, each life here today so that we may live and love with purpose, courage, and beauty.**

One: O God, who has created each of us in your image and made us one body, each as holy vessels of your presence to one another, create in and among us a holy place.

**All: Give us hearts and minds, we pray, to be open to human vulnerability, To listen to each other with patient and thoughtful attention and support. To perceive the grace of the differences in our embodied experience, To resist what excludes and diminishes, and to dismantle what acts as barriers to flourishing together in love and justice**

One: O God, help us to trust your Spirit's work to make us whole, together in relationships of mutuality and partnership, in sacred rhythms of giving and receiving.

**All: Gather us together to be your people in the world.**

One: In Jesus' name we pray,

**All: Amen.** *(Dr. Tom Reynolds)*

# Litanies

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## I. **Litany of Extravagant Welcome**

Let us pray to the God of our Ancestors, who is the Creator of all Life: Eternal Divine Spirit, we pray for the Church that you created through your Son, Jesus Christ; that it may provide an extravagant welcome and serve those who live with a mental illness, particularly in minority communities.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Guide us, the citizens and leaders of this land, this region and this city ... that we may unite to provide for and protect those of us who are poor, homeless and suffer in mind, body and spirit.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Forgive us as a community, when we knowingly or unknowingly ridicule, look in disgust, neglect or discriminate against those who suffer from mental illness.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Comfort and relieve those who are troubled in mind and spirit. Bring them hope, peace and the consolation of a loving community.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Grant patience and courage to the families and friends of those who are ill. Increase their perseverance as they face challenges to recovery for their loved one.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Protect and defend those living with mental illness from exploitation, addictions and abuse.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Oh Lord, increase our awareness, compassion, and sensitivity so that we can embrace our

siblings and cousins who wrestle with Mental Illness.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Because of their intense pain, and at times, their lack of perceived options, we commend to your mercy and defense all who are contemplating suicide today, right now. Bring someone or something to intervene.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

For the families who have lost a loved one to mental illness, bring them comfort in trusting that your grace accepts their loved one, despite the event that brought them into your loving arms.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Deep within the souls of black and brown people that are across the diaspora, empower us to speak up for those who do not have a voice; save us from making peace with the injustices in the social systems that have failed them.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Guide those who do research for the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses; uphold them with your compassion and diligence.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Eternal Spirit of Love, Giver of life and health, we trust that in your time and way, you will dispel all confusion with your order, all fear with your peace. Through Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.  
*(Rev. Colin Jones, Co-Pastor of Advent United Church of Christ in Columbus Ohio)*

# Litanies

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## II. Litany of Naming

Leader: On this Mental Health Sunday, we join in this Litany of Naming.

**People: As a congregation we are glad to lift up our voices and our spirits to break the silence that often happens when we are confronted with mental illness.**

L: As a faith community, we name the gifts and the often unnamed experiences which come to those who live with a mental illness such as major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, substance use, addiction, historic and generational trauma, racial trauma, grief and eating disorder. We name:

**P: The Hope which upholds our spirit through honest sharing;**

L: The Pain when people turn away because of fear;

**P: The Courage to speak in a safe place the way that Jesus spoke truth with love;**

L: The Strength from being with others who listen compassionately;

L: The Isolation that comes when no one knows what to say;

**P: The Realization that mental illnesses and brain disorders can be managed;**

L: The Exhaustion that comes with living with a mental illness as well as for those who are caregivers;

**P: The Welcome of mental health as part of our church's ministry and outreach;**

L: The Wisdom that comes when we become educated about mental health;

L: The Spirituality that comes when we walk alongside those who show both resilience and vulnerability in their lives affected by mental illness;

**All: We receive these gifts that we have named, those which are welcomed and those that are challenges. We come before you, our God, knowing we are not alone and that You will show us a way to be and live. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen. (Rev. Alan Johnson)**

# Litanies

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## III Lament Responsive Reading

Leader: God of Grace and God of Mercy, we thank you for life. We thank you for the value of life. God we confess that we are discouraged and feel weary in well-doing.

We have watched over your people, we have prayed for your people, we have eulogized your people, we have stood with them and confess that we have grown weary.

**People: Lord give us strength.**

Leader: God we confess that we aren't sure about ministry and the call to lead your people.

We have been wounded by your people, we have been abused by your people, we have been disrespected by your people, we have been traumatized by your people and have decided to walk away from your people.

**People: Lord guide us and give us power.**

Leader: God we confess that we are low in spirit and need you to lift us.

Watching all the deaths of persons during the pandemic, watching all of the political posturing during the pandemic, watching the polarization of people and politics, watching morals and values diminish, we need to see your power and your might that can bring about a change.

**People: Lord have mercy.**

Leader: God we confess that our families have been disturbed and even destroyed. Our livelihoods have been changed forever. Our faith has fluttered. Our love has been torn. Our trust has been tested. And we need you to heal and restore like only you can.

**People: Lord heal us.**

Leader: God forgive us for our unbeliefs. Forgive us for our moanings and groanings. Forgive us for wailing in our spirits. In our release, we cry before your throne of grace. God hold our tears in your hands. Hold our hearts next to yours. Keep our spirits so that when this is over, we can be like the phoenix and rise to our next.

**People: Lord fill us with your love.**

Leader: Continue to watch over us. Don't allow us to destroy ourselves and our people with our brokenness. Bless us in mighty marvelous ways as we all work towards healing and wholeness.

**ALL: Lord anoint us for the days ahead and help us to radiate the love and light of Christ. Amen.**

*(Bishop Allyson Abrams, PhD)*

# Prayers of Confession and Words of Assurance

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## I. **Prayer of Confession:**

God of promise and possibility, we come before you broken and breathless, thinking we are trudging through a valley of lifeless bones. We look for life amidst the bones and dust and fail to notice your breath flowing in and around us. We think we need to be perfect before we can enter the new life you have for us. We become fearful when illness in body, mind, or spirit enters into our lives or the lives of those around us. We worry that sickness of body, that mental illness, is a judgement from you. We would rather walk in a valley of bones than believe that your Love, your Spirit, claims us all—in our brokenness and our wholeness.

Open us to the power of your Spirit, a power that makes us all whole: bone, sinew, and flesh filled with your breath. Let us remember that you do not leave us alone in a valley filled with dusty, dry bones; You call us into new life, again and again.

### **Words of Assurance:**

One: Hear the Good News: No valley is too despairing, broken, or dusty for God to enter in. No fear, no chaos, no hopelessness is beyond the reach of the One whose breath gives us life.

**All: Through Christ, God sees only our wholeness. Through Christ, forgiveness, love, and new life are always possible.**

One: Come, Holy Spirit, come. Make all things new.

**All: We are reclaimed and remade by the**

**Spirit of Life. In our brokenness and in our wholeness we are God's beloved. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

*(Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe, based on Ezekiel 37)*

## II. **Prayer of Confession**

**All: Creator God, You are full of grace and justice. You are Holy and Wholly present with us every moment of our lives. In our rush to compartmentalize and create control in our lives, we have sometimes ironically allowed seeds of chaos to be planted in our relationships with others. We have sought to put people and their illnesses, struggles, and complexities at bay while we justify ourselves as "normal" or "quirky." Yet in your Righteousness, Lord, You have seen fit to be steadfastly patient and divinely compassionate with all of your Creation—including us.**

**We confess both our subconscious and willful othering that provides us false protection from our own inner battles. You said that if we confess, you will draw us close and wrap us in your forgiveness that provides both truth and love. We come before you with humble hearts and contrite spirits asking for your pardon. Continue to grant us the invaluable gift of the ability to know one another and walk together in an intimacy that only you can manifest.**

**Into Your care, we commit our collective weakness, assured by Your omniscient strength and love. Amen.**

*(Rev. Shernell J. Edney Stilley)*

# Children and Youth Ministry

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## When God Cries

Desmond Tutu's beloved children's book *God's Dream* describes a young boy who cries when he realizes that his selfish actions have caused a rift in a friendship with a classmate. Tutu writes that God cries, too, when we hurt others and are ourselves hurt. I'm taken by this sentiment of God crying with us; and the message that God is not too holy to feel. God is not above emotion, but God is below. We find God alongside us in the depths of our suffering; God cries, too.

In my children's sermon about mental health, I show the children a small, unopened package of tissues. I ask a volunteer to open the package and share with us what they discover inside. Carefully a tissue emerges from its package. Then I ask for a tissue from the child. I share that I need it to wipe my eyes because I had been a little teary that morning.

We talk about how when we have big feelings that don't have words, they come out as tears. I share Tutu's book, showing them the page where the boy is crying. I read to them about how when we are crying, God cries, too.

We talk about how tissues are also used when we

are sick and have a runny nose, a bad cold or a sinus infection. Sometimes when we are very sick, we go to the doctor and get medicine.

Our brains, just like our hearts and our lungs, need to be healthy. But sometimes when we are not feeling good, we go see a doctor. I share that my brother went to the doctor because his brain was not feeling good. The doctor gave him medicine to help him feel better.

Now my brother is home from the hospital and his brain is doing better. Mental health means taking care of our whole body; including our brain. When our brain is healthy, we feel better.

Sometimes we cry when we are feeling sad. And when we cry, God is with us. When we are sick and not feeling good, God is with us. We are never alone because God is always with us. God loves us even when we cry and when we feel sick, even when we are happy and feel healthy.

Let us pray: Thank you God for tears that express how we are feeling. Thank you, God, for our brains that help us know your love. Thank you, God, for mental health and for people who help us feel better when we are sick. We love you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund)

# Children and Youth Ministry

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## A Mental Health for People of All Ages

Please join me in a moment of silence before we pray. *(Wait for 3 full breaths)*

Creator God, each day we live on the edge of above and below, of inside and out.

We live in spaces in between knowing and never knowing.

Between believing and questioning.

Between clarity and uncertainty.

These spaces create confusion in us. Back and forth we meander along a winding road that begins to feel like a labyrinth with no center. No exit. No way out. Too often we live in stuck places like these.

We rock back and forth back and forth craving something that feels certain. It feels as if there is no space for us to rest... except within the wideness of your love.

In you, our loneliness in the shadow fades.

Instead, overwhelming shadows are replaced with the tiniest ray of hope.

Hope.

Found in a speck of light barely shining through: it reminds us when we fall, you will sit with us there.

When we finally feel able to emerge from the shadows, you will be with us. Then slowly...your Spirit moves within us. In all times, you will be with us. For this, God of light, we are grateful.

Thank you for the questions, the uncertainty, and for our confusion. Through them we travel closer to you.

Thank you for helping us listen to the inner knowing of Spirit and for answers when they come. Through them we are reminded of your constant presence.

And now, bless all those who suffer today in mind, body, and spirit.

May you bless us all with your healing ministry of love.

*(Adapted by Jennifer A. Riddle, MDiv. from original by Rev. Lorraine E. Leist for a youth led mental health worship service.)*

# Sermon Starters

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## Psalm 23

A biblical image that underscores our calling to provide support to those who are disconnected and who may be vulnerable is in Psalm 23. We think about a Shepherd who holds and is rocking the lamb. Also, there is the rod and the staff of the Shepherd that provides comfort as well as signs of strength in face of opposition. They are used to fight off the dangers. The Shepherd prepares a table in the presence of one's enemies. This is a Shepherd who advocates for the vulnerable, who protects the hurting, and who creates that place where there is calm and rest.

## Ephesians 6:10-17

Ephesians 6:10-17 speaks to many people who are seeking to find their own confidence and inner strength. The armor of God includes "the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes so as to proclaim the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Imaging yourself with these objects, you can see them not as heavy but metaphorical as gifts that will give you what is needed to continue on with assurance of being embraced by the divine. You can see yourself embraced and defended with the metaphorical armor of faith. You are given the strength to find your own inner resources of confidence, trust, and giftedness.

## Lamentations 5:19-22

Mental illness remains one of the most stigmatized disorders in North American society. Stigma refers to those negative attitudes and beliefs that arouse fear, rejection, avoidance, and discrimination against individuals with mental illness. Consequently, individuals with mental illness may internalize those negative

attitudes and beliefs, so much so that they may conceal symptoms and fail to seek treatment. Stigmatization also contributes to an approach to Christian faith that is at dis-ease with expressions of psychological distress (e.g., depression or anxiety), and thus may lead Christian congregations to treat individuals with mental illness as outcasts.

The primary literary form utilized in the book of Lamentations is the lament, which is a prayer of protest, complaint, and grief that fervently appeals, either individually or communally, for divine deliverance. Its purpose "is to address God in the midst of inexplicable suffering." At its essence, a lament is a "cry for help." As such, it is familiar—in content, if not in form—to all of us, for who among us has not cried out – in anger, grief, frustration, or torment – at some point in our lives? Individuals with mental illness know lament all too well. While Lamentations chapter 5 fits the form critical category of communal lament, the "themes of the alienation of God's people" in verses 19–22 can be seen as analogous to the stigma of mental illness, and thus gives voice to the lament of those with mental illness, substance use disorders, or other brain differences.

## John 13:31-35

As we talk about breaking down stigma, we remind ourselves of what Jesus said to the disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you... By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35) Jesus is speaking of unconditional love, and yet there is work to love. Breaking down stigma related to mental health is not simple, it requires a great deal of love that is built out working to understand another's journey.



# Sermon Starters

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## Sermon Starter: Psalm 88

“Where is God in the Unknowing”

If you have never experienced the devastation of a serious mental illness, Psalm 88 is one place to begin. This Psalmist describes feelings of sadness, isolation, anger, abandonment, mistrust, spiritual emptiness and hopelessness. But sometimes it is precisely with our wounds and in our brokenness that we are most open to God. When we let go of our need to control and are truly open to God’s trans-forming grace, we find that the darkness becomes a time not of doing and knowing, but of being and unknowing. It is here that we discover the source of mystery that holds us and surrounds us even when we are not aware of that Divine presence.

## Sermon Starter: 1 Samuel 16:14-23

“Mental Illness and Older Adults”

The young David is introduced to the troubled King Saul who is tormented by “an evil spirit from the Lord.” David’s provides soothing music for the troubled king. But, more importantly, he is caring and compassionate even in the face of Saul’s terrible rages. Too often we try to explain behaviors we do not understand by labeling them as an “evil spirit” or as a punishment from God. Medical science has taught us much about illnesses of the brain. Modern researchers have theorized that Saul suffered from a mental illness. As people of faith, we are called to share God’s love and compassion with those who are hurting. We can and should be instruments of healing and comfort to those we know are suffering from a

mental illness through no fault of their own, just as David was an instrument of healing and comfort to Saul.

## Sermon Starter: Acts 2:1-21

Have you ever really paid attention to this account of the first Pentecost? I mean really paid attention. It’s a deeply unsettling story. Winds blowing open doors and flames dancing above heads, not to mention a babble of languages tumbling from familiar mouths. I don’t think we listen well to this story. We like the coming of the Holy Spirit part, but what of those disciples who appeared drunk to some of the onlookers? What of the weird and seemingly unholy happenings? We tend to dismiss them and focus on the good parts, the parts like all who call on the name of the Lord are saved. That sounds way better than holy heads on fire and uncontrollable winds and foreign languages tumbling out of familiar mouths.

Some would say that this passage only speaks of God’s power and reminds us that the Holy Spirit is a Mystery and completely untamable. While this is true, this passage can have a whole lot more to say to us, especially on this Mental Health Sunday.

There’s no comment on right theology, right behavior, right thinking, right living. It also doesn’t say that those who struggle with physical or mental illness have no place in the Body of Christ. This strange story of the first Pentecost reasserts that salvation, the Love of God shown in Christ, is for all people. *(Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe)*

# Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

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- I. O God, who is beyond names, and yet who Jesus called Abba, who is the mystery of life itself, which still is at the center of all that is and comes close to us, we seek to be present to your presence. Though we have fallen short of the ways we are to be living in your realm, your way which is here and is yet to come fully, we bring all that we have done, and that which we have not done, seeking your mercy.

Out of the many of our own vulnerabilities, we offer You our prayer for hope and compassion for those who are living with a mental health disease. We place before you the illnesses of major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar and anxiety disorders, eating and post-traumatic stress disorders, and alco-holism and drug addiction. You know us through and through and will never forsake anyone. Be with those who live with these conditions and their loved ones, so

we all know that You are our sustainer and our guide.

Yet in these life disruptions, You come in surprising ways to lead people through the church, organizations, medicines and treatment centers to help us discover the ways to live, to discover the core of who we are as Your beloved children. Be the light in our despair; be the love in the places of our isolation; be the truth when our fears bring falsehood; and be the grace that overcomes our shame. You are the God who came in Jesus to show us who you are. May we find our true selves in You as we receive all the gifts which You have given us. We thank You. Embolden us to speak and live with honesty and courage, embracing our vulnerabilities and find Your grace which is sufficient for our every need. Through the living Spirit of Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen. *(Rev. Alan Johnson)*

# Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

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II. God of love, we celebrate that today you are still speaking a word of acceptance, wholeness, and inclusion of all your differently-abled people. We give thanks for this church and the ways we seek to live out Jesus' commandment to love You, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

On this Mental Health Sunday, we pray for people who live with untreated mental illness and who are unable to find help and cannot afford medical care.

We pray for an end to the stigma of mental illness.

We pray for families torn apart by mental health diseases, and for families that hold-on-to one another during difficult times of illness.

We pray for those who have lost a loved one to suicide.

We pray for mental health caregivers, for scientific researchers, and for professionals who seek to bring compassion, treatment and healing to those who suffer from brain diseases.

We pray for children, teens, and young adults learning how to live with newly diagnosed brain diseases.

We pray for people burdened by labels and stereotypes.

We pray for people who are victims of bullying and discrimination because of their disability.

We give thanks for the many gifts that people with mental health disease bring into the world and celebrate the creative genius of artists, scientists, authors, scholars, business leaders, actors, musicians, inventors, and presidents who live with mental illness.

Still speaking God, as the mysteries of the human brain unfold, we remain in awe of the intricate ways in which we are created in your image.

May we be reflections of your love in this world. Amen. *(Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund)*

# Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

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## III. **God of Biodiversity, Neurodiversity**

God of a biodiverse world,  
God of a neurodiverse people,  
We pray for communities that  
value neurodiversity.  
We pray for communities that embrace  
diverse thoughts and ideas.  
We pray for communities that make physical  
space for neurodiverse individuals.  
We pray for communities that recognize  
neurodiversity as a community asset.  
We pray for organizations that can hear us,  
see us and respond to our  
neurodiverse needs.  
We pray for organizations that serve, that  
care, that love.  
We pray for organizations that respond to us  
simply because we say we have a need.  
We pray for organizations that adapt to  
human needs.  
We pray for people who look past our  
behavior to understand the needs that  
drive our behavior.

We pray for people who understand that  
behavior is a communication tool.  
We pray for people who are willing  
to sacrifice their comfort to  
protect neurodiversity.  
We pray for people who have the courage  
to challenge the systems that reduce  
neurodiverse needs to right and wrong.  
We pray for stories that help a neurodiverse  
society see itself.  
We pray for stories in which neurodiversity is  
a cause for celebration.  
We pray for stories in which people  
are complex.  
We pray for stories in which neurodiversity  
makes us hopeful about the future.  
We pray for stories that make us weep at  
the loss of neurodiversity.  
In your biodiversity, we see the truth of  
your grace.  
Thank you.  
In your neurodiversity, we see the promise  
of your love.  
Thank you. Amen. *(Dr. Kimberly Douglass)*

# Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

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## IV. Prayers of the People

God of heaven and God of earth, God who makes the earth spin on its axis and sets the sun out by day and the moon by night,

We thank you for creating us and giving us life.

God cover those who are struggling on today.

Cover those who feel displaced and left out on today.

Cover those who feel different and those differences have separated them from their communities.

God help us as believers to accept all of your creation.

Help us to embrace those who look different, those who think differently, those who process differently and those who see the world through a different lens.

God give us ALL patience as we grow to understand each other and those things that make us unique.

God we ask that LOVE will prevail in all that we say and do.

Help us to speak words of comfort and encouragement as often as possible.

We pray for those who are seeking guidance and help with their mental health on today, strengthen them to complete their processes and accomplish their set goals.

We pray for those who are hesitant to accept available help, allow them to take your hand and trust you to guide them to a place of help and healing.

We pray for those who are lost, help them to find their way. Guide their feet and direct their path.

God, we know that you are a comforter. Comfort all of those who need you and have called upon your name.

God, we know that you are a healer. Heal those who have hurting hearts, hurting spirits, and hurting minds.

Thank you God for remembering your people and assuring us that we are in your hands.

Thank you for assuring us that the righteous will never be forsaken.

We love you and we thank you for life and love on today.

This is our prayer we lift to you in Jesus Holy Name. – Amen  
*(Bishop Allyson Abrams, PhD)*

# Offertory Prayer and Prayer of Dedication

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## I. Invitation to Offering

A: In our offering we share not only measurable treasures of time, talents and resources, we also radically commit to sharing immeasurable gifts of forgiveness, grace, compassion, acceptance and loving concern with each other and with ourselves.

B: To be a community that supports flourishing life for all people, we must create new ways of being together that honour and celebrate the neuro-diverse gifts that each of us bring. We must create new economies that do not attempt to quantify, judge or label what we bring into the community, but that gives thanks for generous hearts willing to share.

C: We long to be members of the beloved community. We desire to experience God's kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven. And so we share what gifts we can, laughter, love, hope, tears, time, talents and treasures, to do our part, trusting that the kin-dom is close when we are working together in community.

## II. Dedication Prayers

A: In all that we do, all that we say, and all that we give, may we support the wellbeing and flourishing of all of your creation. Amen

B: Loving God, open us to a new world. Where there is no longer least and greatest, rich and poor, haves and have nots. A world where all are treated as beloved precious children. A world where mental health is understood to be physical health and cared for without stigma or judgement. Until that day comes, bless our small contributions of time, talent and treasures and may it work towards the building of your new world. Amen.

C: May these gifts help to build the community of care and compassion that we hope to create. May they be a legacy of justice, hope, faith and most importantly love. Amen.

*(Offertory and dedication prayers by  
Rev. Dr. Alydia Smith)*

# Closing Prayer/Benediction

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- I. One: The One who created all that is calls us by name and invites us into a life of abundant Love.

**All: We go out into the world as God's beloved people, bringing Holy Love to all whom we meet.**

One: Jesus taught us to love one another as fiercely and freely as God loves each of us, with the power that binds us together as the Body of Christ.

**All: We will embody Christ by shattering stigma and welcoming all, leaving no one outside.**

One: The Spirit fills us with the Breath of Life and urges us to imagine anew how to be Church in the world today.

**All: We will breathe deeply and move beyond what has been and what is. We will follow the Spirit and bring hope and healing to all who live in despair and brokenness. We will be the Church!**

*(Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe)*

# Closing Prayer/Benediction

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II. One: Holy One, Creator, God of many tribes and nations

**All: By every name you are known, you bless the earth!**

One: By your spirit and imagination

**All: Light the path to right relationships.**

One: Break the stereotypes, banish inaction, bring justice.

**All: End the long apart-ness that has twisted our souls.**

One: Help us see each other clearly

**All: And rejoice in one another's strength;**

One: Help us hear each other deeply

**All: And join in the friendship dance;**

One: Help us guard each other's rights

**All: And walk long together in good company.**

One: Help us find your direction for us.

**All: Help us risk building right relationship.**

One: Accompany us as we pledge ourselves to:

**All: Honor one another in the stories and ideas we share...Seek to dismantle barriers that prevent the kind of communion you call us to be as your Church, in which people with**

**mental health challenges are full participants. And strive to co-create a culture of mutuality characterized by loving respect, partnership, and belonging among all.**

One: We ask that you would give us courage, creativity, and commitment for our journey.

**All: Help us keep faith with each other and so with You.**

One: Holy One, Creator, God beyond tribes and nations, beyond barriers that divide, Be with us all.

**All: Amen.** *(Dr. Tom Reynolds adapted from Circle and Cross pg. 54)*

III. God, we thank you for the hope of a new day and a fresh start. We give thanks for the reminder that "it's ok to not be ok" and that it's better to tell the truth about what's really going on for us, get support and help, than to suffer in silence and alone. We thank you God that you never give up on us even when we feel like giving up on ourselves. We thank you that we can hold onto hope one day at a time. We are grateful for this faith community where we can experience sacred welcome, inclusion, support, and engagement for mental health. Bless us with the power of your Spirit that is holy as we share your love with others in our mission to end the stigma and shame of mental illness. In the name of the Disabled and Neurodiverse God we pray,

*Amen. (Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund)*



# Suggested Hymns

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## **Take, O Take Me as I Am**

Words: John Bell and Graham Maule  
Music: John Bell (1995)

## **When I Needed a Neighbour**

Words and Music: Sydney Carter (1962)  
Tune: NEIGHBOUR

## **Amazing Grace**

Words: John Newton;  
Tune: NEW BRITAIN

## **Bless God, O My Soul**

Words: Russell E. Sonafrank;  
Tune: SPRING WOODS

## **Help Us Accept Each Other**

Words: Fred Kaan;  
Tune: AURELIA

## **Healer of Our Every Ill**

Words and music: Marty Haugen

## **In the Bulb There Is a Flower**

Words: Natalie Sleeth;  
Tune: PROMISE

## **On Eagle's Wings**

Words and Music: Michael Joncas

## **Come and Find the Quiet Center**

Words: Shirley Erena Murray;  
Tune: BEACH SPRING

## **My Life Flows on in Endless Song**

(How Can I Keep from Singing)  
Words and music Robert Lowry

## **Lord of All Hopefulness**

Words: Jan Struther;  
Tune: SLANE

## **O Love That Will Not Let Me Go**

Words: George Matheson;  
Tune: ST. MARGARET

## **Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant**

Words and music: Richard Gillard

## **O God in Whom All Life Begins**

Words: Carl P. Daw, Jr.;  
Tune: NOEL

# Wisdom Tips for talking about Mental Health

## **Be a Friend:**

"A friend loves at all times..." (Proverbs 17:17a).

Listen without judgment. Provide companionship. Offer a ride or a meal. Respect confidentiality. Avoid shame and guilt. Remember that we all have and we all are impacted by mental health.

## **Remember that Words can Hurt:**

"Rash words are like sword thrusts..." (Proverbs 12:18a).

Pay attention to the words you use and how they affect the people around you. Avoid labelling and stereotyping people.

## **Stop the Stigma:**

"We, who are many, are one body in Christ" (Romans 12:5).

Challenge negative attitudes toward mental health and neurodiversity whenever you encounter it. Question your assumptions. Correct misinformation about mental health challenges, substance use disorders, trauma, and brain differences.

## **Educate Yourself:**

"Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?" (Proverbs 8:1).

Learn the facts about the various challenges that can affect mental health, including substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental difference, trauma, and brain disorders. Realize that mental health is physical health.

## **Thank God for Neurodiversity:**

"Wonderful are your works" (Psalm 139:14)

Be aware that we all process the world around us differently. Celebrate and affirm neurodiversity and the many gifts that each person brings.

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# Books for Further Study

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Albers, Robert H., and William H. Meller, eds. *Ministry with Person with Mental Illness and Their Families* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2012).

Black, Kathy. *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996)

Crafton, Barbara C. *Jesus Wept: When Faith and Depression Meet* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Coleman, Monica A. *Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith*. (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2016).

*Not Alone: Reflections on Faith and Depression* (Culver City, CA: Inner Prizes, 2012)

*Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith*. (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2016)

Finnegan-Hosey, David. *Christ on the Psych Ward* (New York: Church Publishing, 2018).

Gaventa, William. *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness*. (Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability). (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018)

Hulme, William. *Wrestling with Depression* (Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Books, 1995).

Jones, Serene. *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019)

Keefe, Rachael A., *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* (Atlanta, GA: Chalice Press, 2018).

Kehoe, Nancy. *Wrestling with our Inner Angels: Faith, Mental Illness and the Journey to Wholeness* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Koenig, Harold G. *Faith and Mental Health: Religious Resources for Healing* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005)

Larchet, Jean-Claude. *Faith and Mental Health: Religious Resources for Healing* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2005).

Lund, Marcia. *When Your Family Is Living with Mental Illness*. Difficult Times. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

Lund, Sarah Griffith. *Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking Silence about Mental Illness, Family, and Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2014)

*Blessed Union: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness and Marriage* (Atlanta, GA: Chalice Press, 2021).

# Books for Further Study

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Lund, Sarah Griffith. *Blessed Youth: Breaking the Silence About Mental Illness with Children and Teens* (Chalice Press, 2022).

*Blessed Youth Survival Guide*  
(Chalice Press, 2022).

Mayo, Kelly Raab. *Creativity, Spirituality, and Mental Health* (London, UK: Routledge, 2009).

McCreigh, Kathryn. *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006).

Proeschold-Bell, Rae Jean and Byassee, Jason. *Faithful and Fractured: Responding to the Clergy Health Crisis*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).

Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: a Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010)

Rambo, Shelly. *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018)

Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008)

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Many Forms of Madness: A Family's Struggle with Mental Illness and the Mental Health System* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2010).

Simpson, Amy. *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013).

Stone, Howard. *Depression and Hope: New Insights for Pastoral Counseling* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1998).

Swinton, John. *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

*Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the Care of People with Mental Health Problems*  
(Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000).

Vacek, Heather H. *Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015).

Vanier, Jean, and John Swinton. *Mental Health: The Inclusive Church Resource* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014).

# Websites to Explore

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## Websites for Canadian Mental Health & Wellness Resources

### LifeSpeak wellness platform

<https://www.uccan-benefitscentre.ca/group-benefits/lifespeak-wellness-platform/>

### Employee and Family Assistance Program

**(EFAP)** for active members of the United Church Benefit plan: The EFAP is a confidential short-term counselling and information service provided by Morneau Shepell; the EFAP can be reached at 1-800-387-4765 (English) or 1-800-361-5676 (French). The WorkHealthLife website ([www.workhealthlife.com](http://www.workhealthlife.com)) and the associated mobile application (myEAP) can also be accessed for assistance.

### Mental Health Commission of Canada

A federal organization developing a national mental health strategy, offering support, and programs: <http://mentalhealthcommission.ca/>

**eMental Health** finding mental health services in your community:

<http://www.ementalhealth.ca/>

### Crisis Services Canada

Suicide prevention and support:

<http://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/>

1-833-456-4566

(Quebec residents: 1-866-277-3553)

### Canadian Mental Health Association

Local offices offer services and support:

<http://cmha.ca/>

### Black Youth Helpline

<https://blackyouth.ca>

### Mental Health First Aid

<https://www.mhfa.ca/>

### Psychological First Aid

<https://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/course-descriptions/psychological-first-aid/psychological-first-aid>

### Digital Text and Work Books on Neurodiversity by Dr. Kimberly Douglass

[drkimberlydouglass.gumroad.com](http://drkimberlydouglass.gumroad.com)

## Websites for US Mental Health and Wellness Resources

### United Church of Christ Mental Health

**Network** ([www.mhn-ucc.org](http://www.mhn-ucc.org)) works to reduce stigma and promote the inclusion of people with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, and brain disorders and their families in the life, leadership, and work of congregations. We envision a future in which people with mental illnesses feel welcomed, supported, valued, and included in their faith community. It runs the WISE Congregations for Mental Health © certification, helping faith communities and non-profits across North America become welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged around mental health.

# Websites to Explore

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## General Mental Health Resources

**Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)**

[www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

**Interfaith Network on Mental Illness (INMI)**

[www.inmi.us](http://www.inmi.us)

**Mental Health America**

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

**Mental Health First Aid**

[www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)

**Mental Health Ministries**

[www.mentalhealthministries.net](http://www.mentalhealthministries.net)

**National Alliance on Mental Illness**

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

**National Suicide Lifeline**

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Veterans Lifeline – Option “1”

**National Institute on Mental Health**

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**Pathways to Promise**

[www.pathways2promise.org](http://www.pathways2promise.org)

**Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## Trauma Resources

**Coping with Disasters and Traumatic Events (SAMSHA)**

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**PTSD and Trauma Help Guide from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

**Sidran Institute for Traumatic Stress Education & Advocacy**

[www.sidran.org](http://www.sidran.org)

**The Effects of Racial Trauma on Mental Health: Mental Health America**

[www.mhanational.org/racial-trauma](http://www.mhanational.org/racial-trauma)

## Youth Mental Health Resources

**American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

**Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

[www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org)

**The Child Anxiety Network**

[www.childanxiety.net](http://www.childanxiety.net)

**Child Mind Institute**

[www.childmind.org](http://www.childmind.org)

# Websites to Explore

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## Dementia Resources

### Alzheimer's Association

[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

### For people caring for someone with dementia

[www.alzheimers.gov](http://www.alzheimers.gov)

### National Family Caregivers Association

[www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

## Neurodevelopmental Differences/ Disabilities

### The Arc

[www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org)

### American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

[www.aaid.org](http://www.aaid.org)

### Autism Society of America

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

### Autism Speaks

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

### National Center for Learning Disabilities

[www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org)