**A Dozen Things Your Congregation Can Do in Mental Health Ministry**

1. **Don’t go it alone—**A ministry needs both champions and companions. Recruit two people who can support and encourage each other in initiating this ministry. Have them personally recruit others who may have interest in this area and consider inviting all who are interested to participate. It’s often surprising to discover the gifts, perspectives, and experience present in our congregations.
2. **Use the church newsletter**—Include articles each month to promote the ministry and provide education on some form of mental illness or aspect of recovery. Articles from the ministry team and reflections on mental illness from the pastor on the front-page article can help raise awareness and dispel stigma.
3. **Bring it into worship**—Have a 3-5 minute “Moment for Mental Health” in worship each month. Always in a manner that protects confidentiality, pray for those living with mental illness and their families in the pastoral prayer on a regular basis. In preaching, look for opportunities to discover how the scripture speaks to the lives of those living with mental illness and those who care for them.
4. **Use social media—**Members can repost these reflections to a broader audience. A weekly “Mental Health Monday” on the church Facebook page can be a good place to start. A dozen or more posts can be written at one time and submitted to the church’s social media administrator to upload on a weekly basis.
5. **Teach Sunday School courses**—Annually lead 1-3 Sunday School courses of 4-8 weeks each on some aspect of mental illness. The field is broad, the congregation may well have professionals in the field willing to teach, and the topics will draw different demographics of the church.
6. **Host NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) courses**—NAMI will send trained teachers to lead Peer-to-Peer (for adults with a mental illness diagnosis), Family-to-Family (for family members of adults with a diagnosis), and Basics (for family members of a minor with a diagnosis) Courses at your church. Your church simply provides a good space for these 6-12-week courses to take place. [www.NAMI.org](http://www.NAMI.org)

1. **Observe May as Mental Health Awareness Month and the first week in October as Mental Illness Awareness Week—**Find a variety of ways to educate about mental illness throughout May and October (NAMI is an excellent resource). Use the above means of communication and others for informing the congregation. Invite worshippers to wear a green ribbon or receive a “May-nicure” (painting one fingernail of each willing worshipper green to symbolize the 1 in 5 people living with a diagnosable mental illness in any given year).
2. **Plan and lead a “Service of the Longest Night” on December 21st—**The holidays can be a particularly difficult time of the year for those living with mental illness and their families.A solemn service that names their pain and yearning can be a helpful way of showing care during a season where they may feel disconnected from the joy being proclaimed.
3. **Offer a Mental Health First Aid Course**—This 8-hour course could be just for the pastor and members of the congregation or open to the larger community. It provides an excellent basic level of instruction in understanding mental illness and recognizing and responding to signs that someone may be considering taking their own life. [www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)
4. **Participate in a NAMI Walk**—These walks help raise funds for NAMI’s annual budget and raise awareness of mental illness for the larger community. You might also meet people from other churches who are participating in the walk and can share ideas about their mental health ministry.
5. **Create a display of NAMI brochures and information about local mental health services—**Whether near the church office, in the narthex, or in a well-travelled hallway, a display with a variety of educational brochures from NAMI can be accessed by members and visitors alike throughout the week.
6. **September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.** #BeThe1To make a difference. Include information about the National Suicide Prevention 24/7 Lifeline in your display. Excellent resources for awareness and education about suicide are available from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>