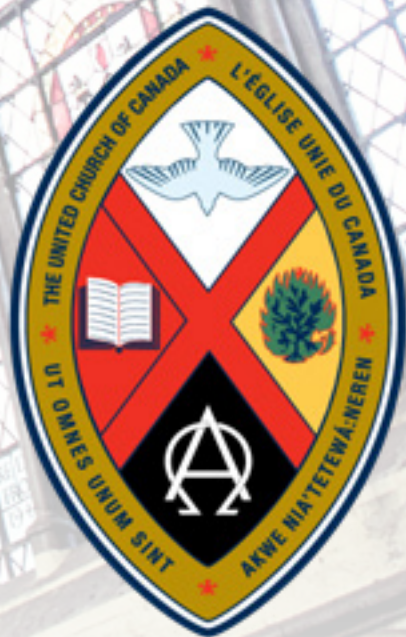


# Radical Belonging:

A Mental Health Sunday Resource for All



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



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# Introduction

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Welcome to **Radical Belonging: Mental Health Sunday Liturgies and Resources for All**, created in prayer and partnership between the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network, an independent mental health ministry in ecclesiastical covenant with the United Church of Christ, and The United Church of Canada, with generous contributions by Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, the United Church of Christ's Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice. As our communities slowly emerge from the collective trauma of COVID-19, we or someone we know has been touched by symptoms of depression and anxiety during the pandemic. The loss of lives, physical contact with beloved people, and life milestones weigh heavy on our lives and our communities.

Within this context, The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network join our voices in calling faith communities to become places of radical belonging. These are intentionally inclusive places where God's Kin-dom manifests through relationships of mutual respect for all people, including those living with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, brain disorders, and their families. Such sacred places offer welcome into all aspects of our shared life, leadership, and work as faith communities, recognizing that God blesses everyone with spiritual gifts and graces to share.

This vision of faith communities as sacred places of radical belonging is not new: Paul shares the image of our Spirit-filled, mutually inclusive communities as "the body of Christ" in the world. The Body of Christ is made of many members

(1 Cor 12, Rom 12), and its health (wholeness) is a factor of all being welcomed as co-creators of life together. The image of God is reflected in relation, not as a property in an isolated individual. Created to be in relationship, the image of God is received and honored in connection with others, creating a communal mosaic, persons being together.

We need not be "perfect," but radical belonging requires more than good intentions; more than offering access to our sanctuaries and superficial greetings to newcomers. Radical belonging calls us to provide welcome, inclusion, support, and engagement with every individual and family. It calls us to look into our own and our communities' conscious and unconscious stigma around difference. This includes acknowledging and dismantling the systemic sins of racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and the oppression of indigenous peoples that emerged from the structures of colonialism and white supremacy. Radical belonging demands living out a theology of human wholeness that is more expansive and inclusive than the narrow European cultural perspectives that declared 'others' as deviant.

Radical belonging challenges simple, harmful theologies that posit health equals goodness, while disabilities, differences, and illnesses are signs of sin. Jesus himself rebuked his disciples in John 9 when they assumed that disability is a consequence of sin, proclaiming that neither the man's parents nor he had sinned to cause the disability, but rather that the works of God may be displayed. In this story, as in many others, the focus is not merely on 'curing' as eliminating

# Introduction

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impairments and illnesses, re-making people to function “normally.” Instead, the emphasis is on the personal and social transformation that takes place through Jesus’ presence.

Mental illness and disability are part of the natural diversity of creation, neither a flaw nor a blessing, but one of the diverse ways of being an embodied creature. The image of God is not as a set of capabilities that can be listed and measured according to standards of exchange value, such that their absence makes someone less human; rather, it is a sign of intrinsic goodness and preciousness that is vulnerable and expressed differently in each person.

In Radical Belonging, you will find liturgy that challenges the systemic sins that create “otherness” and ableism, as well as resources that share the stories of people living with mental illness and disabilities. You will find words of grace and celebration for the opportunities we have as the Body of Christ to love and care for one another, accepting each other as beautiful, wondrous, and vulnerable children of God whose strengths and struggles in the community come together to reflect the image of God.

Together, we of the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network and The United Church of Canada send our prayers and blessings as you raise your hearts and voices on Mental Health Sunday.

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

### **Rev. Amy Petré Hill, JD**

UCC MHN Board Chair & Founder,  
Mental Health & Inclusion Ministries

### **Rev. Shernell J. Edney Stillely**

UCC MHN Board Executive  
Committee Member & Associate Conference  
Minister for Congregational Vitality,  
United Church of Christ New York Conference

## **The United Church of Canada**

### **Rev. Dr. Alydia Smith**

Network Coordinator, Church in Mission Unit  
The United Church of Canada

### **Springwater Hester-Meawassige**

Youth Leadership Coordinator,  
Indigenous Ministries and Justice  
The United Church of Canada

### **Dr. Thomas E. Reynolds, M.T.S., Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Theology at  
Emmanuel College  
University of Toronto

## **The United Church of Christ**

### **Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, MSW, M.Div., D.Min.**

Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice  
Office for Health & Wholeness Advocacy,  
Justice & Local Church Ministries

# 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. One: God invites us to co-create communities of radical belonging for all.

**All: We are creating communities of radical belonging for people living with mental health challenges, conditions, and illness and their loved ones.**

One: Jesus shows us how to love our neighbors as ourselves.

**All: We are loving our neighbors who experience mental health conditions, challenges, and illness and their loved ones. We are loving ourselves no matter where we are on the spectrum of mental wellness today.**

One: The Spirit empowers us to create communities of radical belonging for people with brain diseases and disorders, and people living with substance use and addictions and their loved ones.

**All: We are co-creating with God communities of radical belonging and love for everyone. May our worship inspire and empower us for the journey.**

*(Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund)*

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. God of love, today as we celebrate Mental Health Sunday, stir in us deep compassion for people living with brain disorders and their families. Raise our awareness of how we can create a supportive and safe spiritual community for people who feel isolated, shunned and ashamed. Inspire us to reach out in love as a sign of your radical hospitality and grace. Encourage us to receive the gifts that are given by all, including those who are living with mental health challenges. Amen.

*(Rev Dr. Sarah Lund)*

III. 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, 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)*

## III. The Tie That Binds

One: Creator, we come together in community, as one heart and body.

**All: Braid us together. Let us be bound in love to one another.**

One: We recognize in community when one of us struggles, all of us struggle.

**All: Braid us together. Let us be bound in love to one another.**

One: We join together this morning with a new desire for understanding those in our midst.

**All: Braid us together. Let us be bound in love to one another.**

One: We come to sing a song of hope. We come to dance a dance of peace. We come speaking the words of scripture that inspire.

**All: Braid us together. Let us be bound in love to one another.**

One: We are here. In this place. Let us be moved to understand the journey of others a little bit better today. And let us be ever mindful of the opportunities that will present themselves to us.

**All: Braid us together. Let us be bound in love to one another. (Jeffrey Dale)**



# Prayers of Confession & 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's Message

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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)*

# Scripture Readings

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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)*

# Offertory Prayer & 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 place of radical belonging, we must become a people of radical creativity. We radically create new ways of being together that honour and celebrate the gift of each other's presence. We radically 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, 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 create spaces of radical belonging for all. 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. 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 radical belonging 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)*

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)*



# Suggested Hymns

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*From both denominations and beyond*

## **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. Sonafank;

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



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

## 5 Simple Things You Can Do to make the world a better place for people with mental health challenges and their families

1. **Be a friend.** Provide companionship and compassion on the road toward recovery. Offer a ride to church or to a local support group. Listen without judgement. Pray for those you know with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and for their family members.
2. **Share your story.** Has mental illness impacted you or your family in some way? Your story may empower others to seek treatment or have hope.
3. **Watch your language.** Pay attention to the words you use and avoid stigmatizing labels. Do not refer to people as “crazy,” “psycho,” “lunatic” or “mental.”
4. **Be a “StigmaBuster.”** Challenge negative attitudes toward mental illness among your friends and acquaintances and in the media.
5. **Learn the facts.** Educate yourself about the various mental health challenges, substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, and other brain disorders. Check out the resources at the UCC Mental Health Network ([www.mhn-ucc.org](http://www.mhn-ucc.org)), take a Mental Health First Aid class and host one at your congregation for the larger community. Offer a class or going a support group with the National Alliance on Mental Illness ([www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)) and check out the facts at the National Institute of Mental Health ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)), the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) ([www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)), the Alzheimer’s Association ([www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)). Visit the Mental Health Commission of Canada for education, supports and programs related to mental wellness <http://mentalhealthcommission.ca/>



# Pointers For Successful Conversations About Mental Health

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Conversations about mental health, both public and private, sometimes can be complicated and difficult, especially in a religious context. Below are some Do's and Don'ts that may help.

## DO:

- Be careful to respect your congregants' confidentiality. Many people with mental illness have endured stigma for many years. They may not want others to know they have mental health challenges, substance use disorder, neurodevelopmental difference, or other brain disorder, so always check with the person before talking about their condition publicly.
- Watch your language. Avoid stigmatizing words like "crazy," "nuts" and "psycho."
- Listen without being judgmental or offering advice.
- Talk to others of God's unconditional love for them and your care and concern for them.
- Pray for balance in their lives and tolerance in yours.
- Gently educate those who spread misinformation about mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and brain differences, or perpetuate negative stereotypes.
- Treat persons affected by mental health challenges and their families with compassion, not condescension. Most don't want pity, just understanding and the ability to bring their whole selves and their stories to the congregation.
- Educate yourself about mental health challenges, understanding that some individuals may need more than spiritual counseling. Refer them to appropriate mental health professionals while continuing to support them as a spiritual friend.

## DON'T:

- Don't tell a person with a mental health challenge or substance use disorder to just pray harder. That would not be appropriate advice for someone with cancer or a heart condition, and it is not appropriate for someone with mental illness. Mental illnesses are biological conditions that may have environmental triggers, and frequently respond well to therapies and/or medications, just like other disorders.
- Don't use shame or guilt as a motivator. For many who suffer from mental health challenges and substance use disorders, shame and inappropriate guilt may exacerbate their problems.
- Don't look down on persons with mental illness or substance use disorders for using medications to control their symptoms. Someone with depression using antidepressants is no different from someone with diabetes using insulin.
- Don't forget to find simple ways to support family members and friends of people living with a mental illness. A card, a meal, and your supportive listening can be healing.
- Don't shy away from talking with a person who has let it be known they are living with a mental health challenge, substance use disorder, or brain difference.

*Some of the above content was adapted from an article by Jan Lutz, "The 'Do's and 'Don'ts of Ministry," published by NAMI Faith-Net.*

# Books for Further Study

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

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*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: 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: Chalice Press, 2018).

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

Mayo, Kelly Raab. *Creativity, Spirituality, and Mental Health* (Farnham, Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

# Books for Further Study

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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 Ltd., 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>

## Websites for US Mental Health & 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)

## 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.aaidd.org](http://www.aaidd.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)