

Restoring the Soul...May - Mental Health Awareness Month

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Each May, during Mental Health Awareness Month, we're invited to listen more deeply—to ourselves, to one another, and to God. It's a time not only for awareness but for reflection and action. For people of faith, and especially in the ELCA, this is sacred work.

Our Lutheran tradition reminds us that every person is made in the image of God—**imago Dei**—and carries inherent worth. Our mental health does not define or diminish that truth. Whether we are in a season of stability or struggle, God's grace meets us exactly where we are.

We proclaim a **theology of the cross**—a belief that God shows up in vulnerability and suffering. This means that Jesus is with us not just when things are going well, but especially when life feels overwhelming. In fact, that's often where grace becomes most visible.

From this perspective, mental health isn't separate from faith, it's part of the faithful life. It's part of our whole selves. We can pray *and* go to therapy. We can trust God *and* take medication. We can hold both spiritual and psychological tools as gifts, not contradictions.

But we must go further. From a psychology standpoint, we are challenged to look beyond the individual and ask: *What systems are shaping our suffering?* Many people experience anxiety, depression, and trauma not only because of biology or brain chemistry—but because of injustice, poverty, racism, abuse, or exclusion.

The Gospel calls us not only to comfort the suffering—but to confront the sources of that suffering.

As faith communities, we are called to be places of refuge, not judgment. We should be stigma-free zones where people are welcomed in all their humanity—not for being "fixed," but for simply being.

Healing is holy. Justice is sacred. Mental health is not a personal failure, -it's a community responsibility.

So this month, and every month, let us ask:

- How can we create space for honesty and healing in our churches?
- How are we addressing the systems that contribute to mental distress?
- How can we show up for one another as Christ shows up for us?

May we become communities of courage and compassion.

May we believe that restoration is real.

And may we hold fast to the promise of Psalm 23: *"You restore my soul."*