



# 12 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 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. The presbytery's Wellness Wednesday Newsletter can provide some good content.

## 3. Bring it into worship

Have a 3-5 minute "Moment for Mental Health" in worship each month. Always protecting 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

The presbytery's Comfort My People webpage lists mental health resources, sends weekly "Wednesday Wellness" emails, and provides spiritual wellness material on our Facebook page. Encourage members to repost these reflections to capture a broader audience. Reposting on the church Facebook page can also be a good place to start.

## 5. Teach Sunday School courses

Annually lead 1-3 Sunday School courses 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 courses

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (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. Visit the NAMI website ([www.NAMI.org](http://www.NAMI.org)) for local contact information. Call or email your local contact to set up a time or event when they can come to speak at a church gathering.

## **7. Monthly Observances**

Observe May as Mental Health 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. Mental Health America ([www.mhanational.org](http://www.mhanational.org)) and NAMI are excellent resources. Use this opportunity to inform 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).

## **8. Plan a Solemn Service in December**

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. “Blue Christmas” or “Service of the Longest Night” are two models of worship that might be helpful in your planning.

## **9. 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. Visit [www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org) for local courses and contacts.

## **10. 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.

## **11. Display Educational Material**

Create a display of 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 resources can be accessible to members and visitors throughout the week.

## **12. September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month**

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. Two websites with helpful resources are:

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) or [www.bethe1to.com](http://www.bethe1to.com).

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Presbytery of St. Augustine

**Comfort My People: Mental Health in Healthy Congregations Initiative**

Susan Lee, LCSW, Comfort My People Coach / Consultant

Chris Lieberman, Relationship Coordination Director

myCMPcoach@gmail.com / [www.staugpres.org/comfort-my-people](http://www.staugpres.org/comfort-my-people)

Material adapted from downloadable resources on the PC(USA) website:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/mental-health-ministry/mental-health-ministry-resources/>