

**GCCHM Leadership Certification
Level 11, Course #1**

**TURNING THE CHURCH'S ATTENTION TO MENTAL HEALTH
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(Presenter's Notes)**

Introduction

There is a growing global mental health movement around the world today; and the global church is beginning to recognize mental health problems, which are the leading cause of disability worldwide—more disabling than heart disease, stroke, or diabetes—as a major ministry priority.

Mental health problems are usually the result of a combination of many factors, including family environment, biology, personality, spirituality, and challenging community contexts, including poverty and violence. Increasingly, the impacts of traumatic events such as childhood abuse, interpersonal violence, or natural disasters are being recognized as major causes of mental health problems.

Scripture Roots

Mental health care is rooted in Scripture:

- Isaiah described part of the mission of the coming Messiah 'to bind up the brokenhearted' (Isa 61:1).
- Jeremiah wrote of the Messiah: 'I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow' (Jer 31:13).
- In the New Testament, we see that, 'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness' (Matt 9:35).

Ellen White's Counsels – Mind, Character & Personality, v. 1, p. 59

Ellen White has much to say about the connection between the mind and the body. Listen to what she said:

“The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which men suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death. . . In the treatment of the sick the effect of mental influence should not be overlooked. Rightly used, this influence affords one of the most effective agencies for combating disease.”

Adventist Fundamental Belief #7 Nature of Humanity

The Adventists believe in the wholeness of man and women as spelled out in the

Fundamental Belief #7 Nature of Humanity.

“Human beings are made in the image of God as “an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit.” Consequently, “we believe in a ‘ministry of healing’ by which we can be restored to wholeness. Our concept of ‘whole’ involves ‘the whole person’: spiritual, physical, mental, and social—as we do not exist in isolation.”

Therefore, we must treat the physical, social, spiritual as well as the mental aspect of illness. Unfortunately, the lack of attention to this important issue both by the church and secular society has left thousands of people with mental health problems stigmatized, judged as spiritually deficient, and sometimes, in the case of major mental illness, locked up and even chained in institutions where they are exposed to poor living conditions, sexual and physical abuse, and neglect.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

- About 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. — 43.8 million—experiences mental illness in any given year.
- 21.4 percent of youth 13-18 will experience a severe mental disorder at some point during their lifetime.

World Health Organization

- Depression is one of the leading causes of disability. Globally, it is estimated that 5.0% of adults suffer from depression (264 million).
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds. People with severe mental health conditions die prematurely – as much as two decades early – due to preventable physical conditions.

What is Our Adventist Mission? Is it just doing the following?

- Preaching?
- Discipleship?
- Baptism?

What about Mental Health? Those with mental health problems have poorer health care, diminished human rights, and higher mortality. They comprise one of the largest mission fields for the church worldwide.

Why the Lack of Attention?

- Stigmatize mental illness as a result of personal sin.
- Focus on care of the soul and neglect the health of the mind.
- Does not accept reality that members do have mental illness.
- Good Christians shouldn't have so much suffering from illness.
- Christians need to pray more and have more faith.
- Illnesses and disabilities don't fit in to mainstream theologies.

The Church—A Healing Presence in Jesus' Name

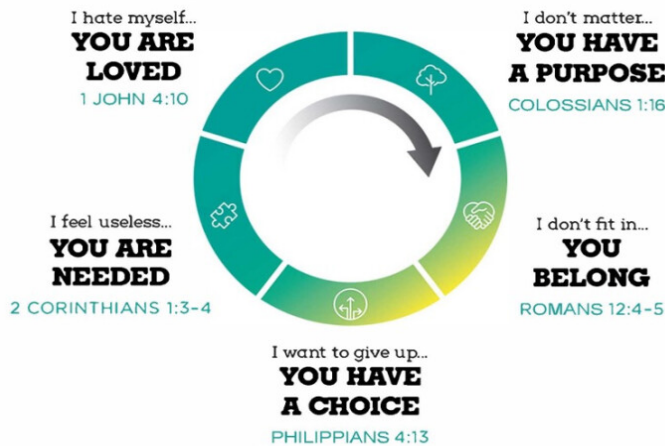
Lowell Cooper, retired Vice-President of the General Conference of SDA urged the church to take mental health issues seriously.

“So, let us not be afraid to talk about it. Let us acknowledge the presence of mental health issues in our circle of acquaintances and in the Church. Let us talk about it publicly—but not with jokes.”

Saddleback Church Mental Health Ministry Model

After Pastor Rick Warren’s son committed suicide in April, 2013, the Saddleback Church realized that they need to minister and care for members’ mental health. So, the church went to work to, consulting mental health professionals to set up services to assist children, teenagers, and adults deal with depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

They adopted the Mental Health Ministry Model.



Five life-transforming Scriptural truths that shape their approach to the Mental Health Ministry are illustrated in The Hope Circle. Each truth combats a negative message that holds people back from moving toward hope. Most people understand that mental illness is just that - an illness - and as such, often requires medication and treatment by mental health professionals for management and improved health.

But the flip side of that realization can lead us to believe that there is nothing significant the faith community can offer to a person living with mental illness. This is a misperception! In reality, the church is tasked with caring for the whole person - body, mind, and soul - and that means we must recognize and care for a person with an illness. The church can speak into the soul and personhood of the individual in ways that medical professionals cannot.

What Can the Church Do?

1. Preach sermons about mental health problems like any other health issue.
2. Educate & raise awareness in your congregation by inviting mental health professionals to speak about mental illness.

Dr Ed Stetzer, Executive Director of Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center, urges pastors to speak openly about mental health problems as one would about any other health issue and to educate their congregations. Stetzer has coined the phrase, 'sermons stop stigma'.

Background

- Research in the US shows that often pastors are the first persons a family calls when there is a mental health crisis. Yet, pastors are often reluctant or feel ill-equipped to speak about mental illness from the pulpit.
3. Within your services pray for people who are living with mental illness and their families.
 4. Invite people who are living with mental illness to share their testimony in a church service.
 5. Give your congregation a survey that asks them questions related to mental health.
 6. Provide a referral list of mental health resources available in your community.
 7. Give your congregation a survey that asks them questions related to mental health.
 8. Train volunteers to be "companions" during a church service to anyone appearing distressed, depressed, or lonely.
 9. Start mental health ministry, such as support groups for adults and youth.
 10. Develop a lay counseling ministry.
 11. Hold mental health support groups for children.
 12. Create care teams of 3 or 4 people who will commit to an on-going relationship with an individual or family with mental illness.
 13. Partner with a mental health organization in your community to provide care and services.
 14. Give hope to people who are mentally ill by providing encouraging connections: calls, texts, e-mails, letters, etc.
 15. Build a mental health library with books and resources available.
 16. Hold a mental health ministry event; host a one-day mental health conference

Mental Health Ministries recommends a five-step program for creating caring congregations in the area of mental health:

1. Education
2. Commitment
3. Welcome
4. Support
5. Advocacy

http://mentalhealthministries.net/resources/caring_congregations_model.html

Adventist Church Involvement Today

- Divisions, unions, & conferences have mental health initiatives within the Health Department.
- *Youth Alive* initiative from the Health Ministries department.
- Divisions holding webinars & conferences on mental health.
- Institute of World Missions hire a full-time psychologist for missionary families.

It is essential we continue to communicate that mental health is a high priority and work together to address it.

- As the World Health Organization states, **‘There is no health without mental health.’**
- Addressing issues of mental health and trauma may be one of the most urgent, emerging priorities within the wholistic mission of the global church.

Remember, the Apostle Paul strongly urge us:

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14