

HIGHLAND AVENUE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
Mental Health Awareness Sunday
January 21, 2007
9:30 A.M.

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving us much advice, solutions or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen

We Gather in God's Presence

Welcome and Church News

(announcements begin at 9:27 a.m.)

Prelude

Be Thou My Vision

arr. Helvey

Acknowledging Christ's Light at the Heart of Our Worship

***Call to Worship**

Leader: Our eyes are not God's eyes.

People: Lord, give us your vision.

Leader: Our mind is not God's mind.

People: Lord, give us your wisdom.

Leader: Our heart is not God's heart.

People: Lord, give us your compassion.

Leader: May we see a way where there was no way.

People: May we have light where there was darkness.

Leader: May we offer grace instead of judgment.

ALL: Amen.

***Hymn**

Open My Eyes, That I May See

#517

***Invocation Prayer (unison): O God, we accept that, in some way, we are all broken. We affirm that we do not need to fix one another. We trust in your ability to heal all wounds and invite your healing mercy to be poured out upon us like a salve, bringing light, hope, and wholeness. Amen.**

We Celebrate Our Fellowship

Children's Time

Introduce that today's scripture lesson guides a lot of what we do today as a church.

Invite older, more established readers to help you read parts of the Matthew 25:34-40 text that have been separated onto small pieces of paper, each numbered so the readers can read them in order. End with the leader reading the final scripture: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Question 1: What activities does our church family do that are like these directions from Jesus?

Allow the children to suggest activities such as collecting food for the local food bank, serving the homeless, collecting two-cent meal offerings, visiting those who are sick, providing meals, praying for someone when they are sick or in prison.

Question 2: Sometimes people feel sad or are hurting and are sick in a different way, they are hurting on the inside. They may be sick for a little while or a long time and they didn't do anything to cause this

sickness or feelings. They just are there. What do you think Jesus would want us as the church to do for these folks?

Allow the children to respond. (During this worship, one child blessed the congregation by responding “Comfort them.” Following this response, we moved into a simple prayer.)

Prayer: Dear God, help us to show your love to those who are hurting, hungry, sick, without homes or in jail. Amen.

Sharing Our Joys, Concerns, and Expressions of Faith Miracles Groups Statement to the Church

Recognition of our Mental Health Ministry

At Highland Avenue, three support groups regarding mental illness meet. One group for individuals living with mental illness issues meets weekly. Another for family members and a third for teens living with mental illness issues meet monthly.)

Miracles Group Statement:

Reader One: I am a Living Miracle!

Reader Two: According to John Bradshaw, “a miracle is a profound experience which changes your life.” Mental Illness Recovery is possible. It is a process. It can profoundly change your life.

Reader One: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change; the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Reader Two: Through the Miracles Group, we hope you will find the support you need for living with a mental illness. By sharing our stories we know that there is hope. We see that we each have had our struggles, our dark days, but we no longer are on the journey alone.

Reader One: Through the group process, we gain knowledge about our disorders, find ways to cope and ways to live. Also we have an awareness of how to stay healthy, knowing what triggers our mental illness and when to seek help.

Reader Two: Ultimately we know we are more than the labels we have been given. We are persons on the journey towards wholeness. We find encouragement, knowledge and acceptance, within the strength of the group.

Reader One: Lastly, we expect confidentiality, it is only in this way we know we are safe – safe to share our feelings, concerns and experiences for growth.

Prayer Hymn

Standing in the Need of Prayer

African-American spiritual

Pastoral Prayer

Written by Jeanne Davies and Susan Gregg-Schroeder

Spirit of God, you know our needs: our wounds, our hurts, our fears, even before we can form them into words of prayer. You are patient with us. You are protective of us.

You are present with us until such time as we are able to ask for what we need.

Thank you, God, for your healing taking place within us before we are even aware of how broken we have become.

God, this morning we are mindful of the many blessings you have given us. In particular, we lift up the community of faith, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who bring hope in despair, comfort in sorrow, light to our darkness, joy in all circumstances.

Compassionate God we know there are many who are in need of your healing Spirit. We remember those who suffer from war and violence, both in our country and abroad. Lead them to a place of safety and peace.

We remember those who struggle with mental illness and ask that you bring them healing and comfort.

We lift up the families of those who struggle with mental illness, asking for grace, peace and sustenance.

In this season of dark and cold, we pray for those who are homeless and hungry – may they find shelter and warm food.

Lord, in all these afflictions we pray that you will show us ways to bear your gospel message of light, life and hope.

We ask all these things in the name of the One who brings us healing and wholeness. Amen.

Anthem *God of All Grace* Beebe
(Adult Choir)

We Offer Our Gifts

Call to Giving

Sharing Our Tithes and Offerings
Offertory

The Water is Wide

Folk Melody

We Listen for the Word

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25:34-40

Dramatic Reading

You – Sitting in the Pew Next to Me

Ann Weems
Taken from *Reaching for Rainbows*

Epistle Reading

Ephesians 3:16-21

Meditation

Hope Beyond Imagination

By Pastor Jeanne Davies

As you walked through the sanctuary door this morning, every fifth person received a wristband on their arm. These bracelets were given out at random to represent the prevalence of mental illness in our country. Mental illness affects people of all ages, races and genders. According to the Surgeon General's report in 1999, one in five people will suffer from serious mental illness in any given year. Half of all Americans have such disorders at some time in their lives. The statistics are the same for children. Major depression is the leading cause of disability in this country. Yet less than one-third of those who suffer from mental illness will receive treatment; the largest barriers to treatment being lack of insurance and also the stigma associated with mental illness. This is a problem that is all around us but one that we are uncomfortable talking about.

But 40 percent of those who reach out for help will turn to a church first, according to Carlene Hill Byron in her book, *Building Up Without Burning Out*. Carlene was, as she terms it, "put out" of her church because of her behavior when she was going through a period of mental illness. And if some people's experience is that they are "put out" the door of their church family, there are many others that never get in the door, because of stigma and shame. Still others stop coming because they do not find the support they so desperately need.

Instead of a place of judgment and dis-ease, the church can be a place of acceptance, support and encouragement. There is evidence that strong social ties can have a profound effect on recovery from mental illness. The World Health Organization, in a three-decade-long study, has found that people with schizophrenia typically do far better in poorer nations such as India, Nigeria and Colombia than in Denmark, England and the United States. Their best explanation is that most people with schizophrenia in poorer countries live with their families or other social networks – in contrast to those in the U.S., who are homeless, in group homes, on their own, in psychiatric facilities or in jail. In India, family involvement and social connections, including low-stress jobs, are seen as central to recovery.

Carlene says that part of her recovery process was finding a church community where she could “re-learn that God is good.” Are we a community that helps people learn and re-learn that God is good? If we are the Body of Christ, then our actions should always reflect what is the goodness of God. It’s a lesson that bears a lifetime of repeating, and not only for those of us who experience mental illness. We can share this gospel message by offering the gifts of compassionate presence, grace and hope.

In the 16th century, Teresa of Avila wrote, “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” To act as Christians is to embody the presence of Christ. It is hard to approach someone when there is an underlying sensitive issue. There can be awkwardness. And sometimes it is good to be gentle and cautious with one another. But I urge you to pray that you may embody Christ’s love, in whatever way is best: as the ancient prayer says, “Christ be in my mind and in my thinking, Christ be in my ears and in my listening, Christ be in my words and in my speaking.” Don’t be afraid to call, to visit, to include, most of all to listen. The Miracles Support Groups were established so that there is a place for people affected by mental illness to tell their stories, share their experience, and feel the support of their faith community.

Part of embodying Christ’s presence is also advocating for those who are most severely afflicted, many of whom have exhausted other avenues of support. One in three people who experience homelessness suffer from a mental illness. Mental health services and social support are in short supply for those who are struggling to find food and a warm place to sleep.

Another gift Christians have to offer is grace. In our faith tradition there is no working out of karma. Bad things happen to good people for unknown reasons. Mental illness is not their fault. It’s not our fault. It’s not God’s fault. Suffering is a mystery to be lived through by the grace of God, not a problem to be solved. Healing is also a mystery. There is no sure treatments or answers that work for every mental illness. Seeking solutions in the form of therapy and medication is critical. But the role of the Christian community is to know that ultimately fixing and healing is beyond our control and up to the Holy Spirit. And so we pray together and hope. Henri Nouwen writes, “When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving us much advice, solutions or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”

One of the greatest gifts we have to give, as Christians, is hope. Mental illness grinds people down – not only those who are afflicted but also friends and loved ones. It is easy to become discouraged. We can hold the Christ light for those who walk in darkness. Our resources are not bottomless but God’s are never-ending. God offers us hope of a future beyond that which we can imagine. And so we can offer these words of encouragement to one another, “Don’t give up. I believe it can get better. I believe that God has a future in store for you that is better than I can imagine or that you can imagine for yourself. I believe in miracles.” Use your eyes of faith to see beyond mental illness to a life of health and wholeness. Patiently offer hope beyond imagination; the hope offered by the One who knows us, loves us, and restores us.

We Go Forth to Love and to Serve

***Hymn**

Help Us to Help Each Other

#362

***Benediction**

Written by Jeanne Davies

I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth

and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to God, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to our God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

***Choral Benediction**

God Be in My Head

Rutter

***Taking Christ's Light into the World**

Postlude

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Gesangbuch

*Depart when you wish during the postlude, but please do so quietly,
mindful of those who wish to remain to listen and meditate.*

***Please stand, if you are able.**