



Providing  
understanding  
and Mutual Support  
when people experience  
mental illnesses  
in our churches  
and communities.

- **Laurel St. Mennonite Church, Lancaster.**
  - **Church leader in 5 churches & mission field**
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- **Eastern Mennonite University**
  - **Mental health / Stigma**
  - **Masters & LCSW in Clinical Social Work**
  - **20+ years working in all levels of MH/SA**
  - **Treatment/support programs. (1000+ stories)**
  - **ED of We Rise International / Program Manager and lead trainer – Churches Care Program**







- A brief overview of the key issues we need to think about regarding mental illnesses and mental health struggles and how to support people
- A discussion of why this is an important topic for us to think about – and to take action on in our churches





Poll # 1

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**Mental Health  
struggles  
are an "US" Thing  
Not a  
"THEM" Thing.**

## Mental Health By the Numbers

- 1 in 5 U.S. adults live with a mental illness (51.5 million in 2019).
- *Mental Illnesses do not discriminate (Christians)*
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in U.S.
- Only half of people with mental illnesses receive treatment.
- 25 percent of people who experience a mental illness say the first place they reached out to for help was not a doctor's office, counseling office, or clinic -- it was a local church.
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## What do we mean by Mental Illnesses?

**Major Depression (mild,  
moderate, severe)**

**PTSD (Post Traumatic  
Stress Disorder)**

**Bipolar Disorder**

**Schizophrenia  
&  
Schizoaffective Disorder  
&  
other illnesses that cause  
psychotic symptoms**

**Seasonal Affective  
Disorder**

**1.) Single Episode/Temporary**

**2.) Recurrent (more than 1x)**

**3.) Chronic/Persistent (lifelong treatment and managing of the illness required Symptoms vary over time.)**

**Eating Disorders**

**Panic Disorder (Panic  
Attacks)**





Feeling or acting Isolated.

Separate. Alone.

Acting more Withdrawn.

Quiet.

Angry. Short fuse. Agitated.

Sad. Tearful. Despair.

Anxious. Fearful.

Less emotions. No emotions.

Less focus. Difficulty concentrating. Losing things.

Changes in thinking.

Less hope. Loss of hope.

Less involved in things he/she loves.

Less energy. Exhausted. Or way more energy than usual

Overwhelmed.

Having thoughts or beliefs quite unusual for them;

Hearing voices.

Irrational/unusual thoughts of being in danger or under attack.

Thoughts of harming self or others (suicidal/homicidal thoughts)

## SYMPTOMS



**\*Physical Symptoms –**  
sleep/appetite/energy/weakness  
/soreness/heart rate/breathing...



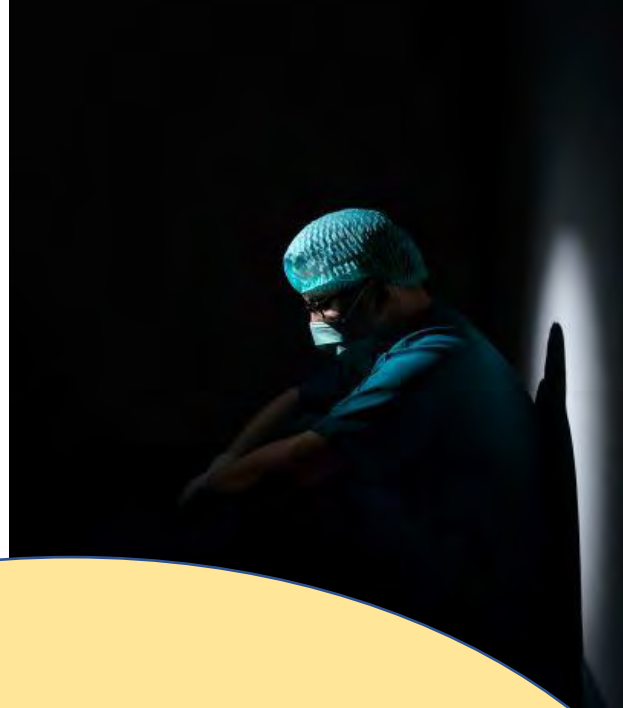


Mental Health struggles  
and *Faith*.



**This year -- In addition to Mental Illnesses there are additional Mental Health Struggles & Needs in our Churches and communities – even more than usual.**



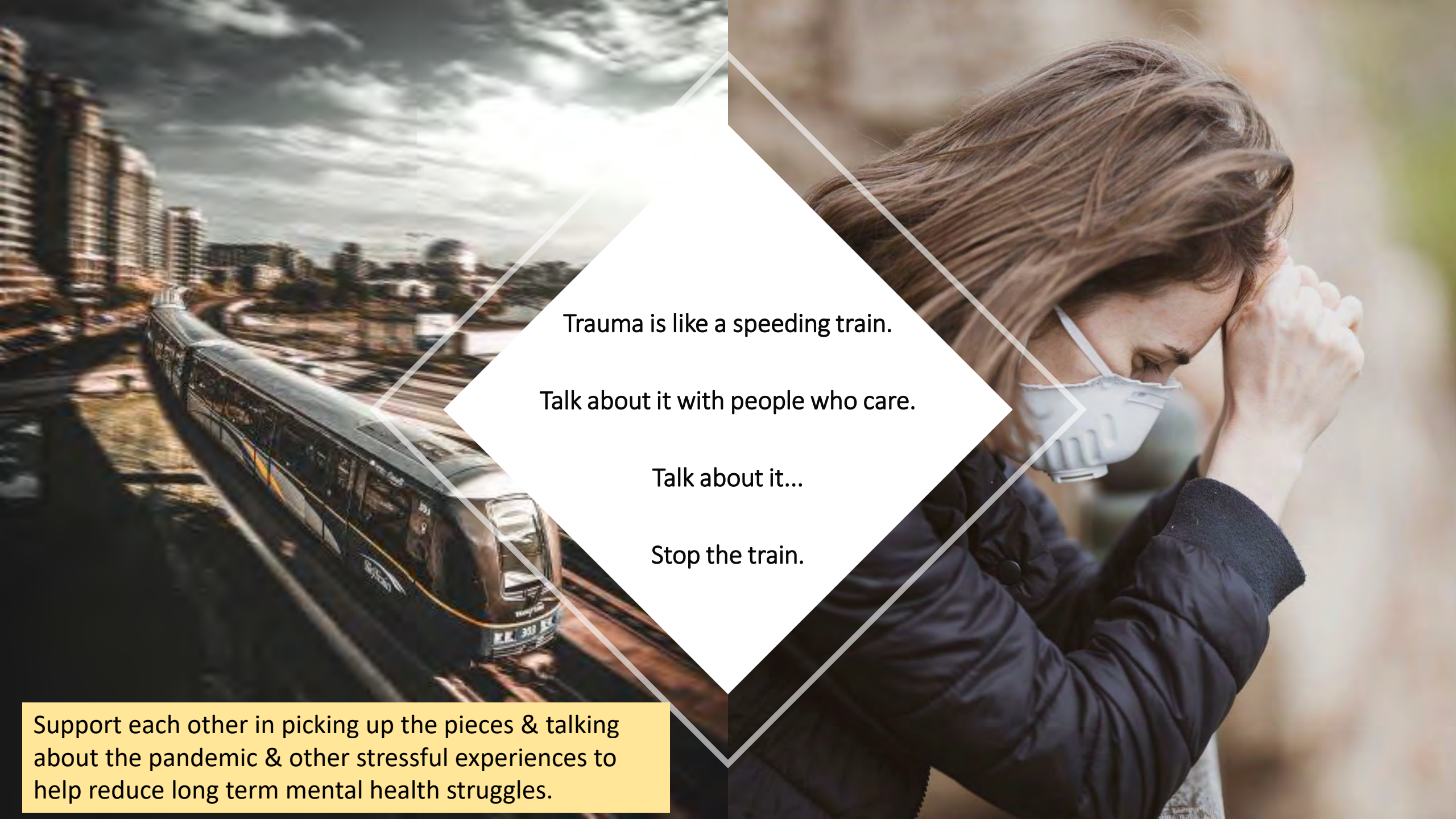


**Many people are expected to continue experiencing mental health struggles due to their experiences of stress, change, fear, uncertainty, isolation, trauma and/or losses experienced during the pandemic.**

**Trauma responses (PTSD) and cases of Schizophrenia are expected to increase.**

## COVID 19 Has Affected All of US.

- COVID-19 has added stress and increased #s struggling with MH -- causing even more need for vigilance and intentional caring in our churches.
- But mental health needs always exist even when we're not in a pandemic.



Trauma is like a speeding train.


Talk about it with people who care.

Talk about it...

Stop the train.

Support each other in picking up the pieces & talking about the pandemic & other stressful experiences to help reduce long term mental health struggles.






These are all important reasons why we as Christians and Churches need to be prepared to effectively support each other with mental illnesses & other mental health needs.


**Let's think about how we're doing so far...**

**Poll # 2**

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- Knowing that mental illnesses are common in society and also in our churches – what is the experience that people report they have when they seek support for a mental illness or mental health needs in Christian churches?

A 2013 study on ‘mental illness in the church’ conducted by Christian research organization Lifeway Research found that

- 55% of people surveyed who did not currently attend a church, and even
  - 21 % of surveyed Christians who *did* currently attend a church, responded that they ‘did not think that a church would welcome them if they had a mental illness.’
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## So, what kind of support do people need?

**Emotional** – encouragement, listening, emotional support

**Physical/Medical** -- linking to mental health treatment/Counseling/Medical care

**Social** – babysitting, rides to appointments, help with life tasks during emergencies

**Spiritual** – nonjudgemental spiritual support re: tough spiritual questions

## So how can we support each other & our neighbors better?

- Church-Wide Change
- Support
- Referrals/Linking
- Accompaniment on the journey
- Support the Support People



# Churches should actively & intentionally:

## Increase Awareness

- Mental illnesses & mental health struggles are common and treatable.

## Reduce Stigma/Normalize MH

- YOU are not broken, nor to blame, nor a bad Christian, nor diff. than the rest of us.
- There is no shame in experiencing mental health symptoms or struggles.

## Make support available/

**Share Support Resources** and assure procedures for accessing support are well-shared and repeatedly mentioned/distributed.





# Providing Mutual Support

## MUTUAL means...

- We're in this Together
- We're a Team
- We are equal
- Today I support you. Tomorrow or yesterday you did or will support me.

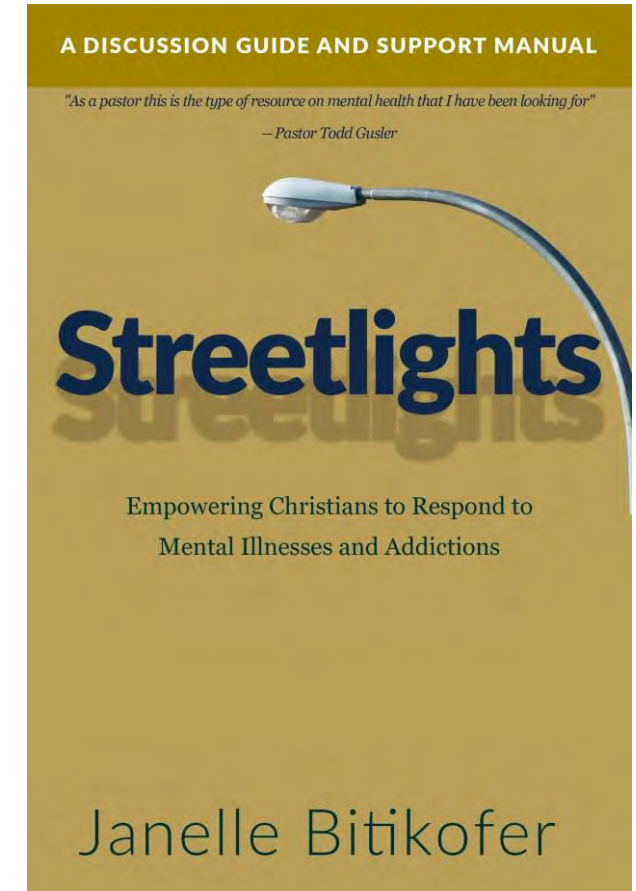


Mental Illnesses/Trauma/Grief affect us:  
**Physically/Medically; Emotionally; Socially; Spiritually**

## SUPPORT (steps/strategies)

- Become knowledgeable
- Pay attention (*if you see something, say something*)
- Reach out
- Ask (how I am really?)
- Listen (without judgement)
- Care (show it & say it)
- **NORMALIZE IT**
- Help me connect to support & treatment when needed
- Walk with me on the journey
- Stick with me no matter what
- Keep learning with me
- Support my support people
- Make sure we both get outside help & support when we need it
- Self-care (*put on your own mask first...*)

- Additional Resources for Christians and Churches:
- 1.) Streetlights Book
- 2.) Churches Care Program



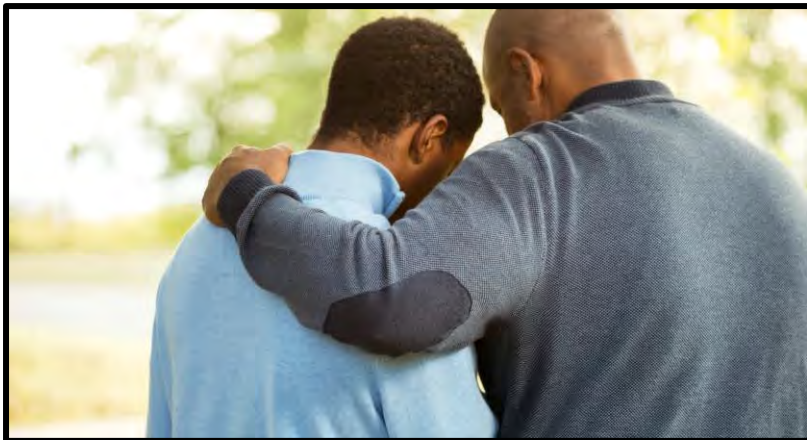
<https://streetlightsbook.com/>



# The Churches Care Program

Chambersburg - Philadelphia - Lancaster...

- Training for Church Leaders
- Clinical Consultations
- Church Assessment
- Educational resources for Congregations
- Networking with other Churches



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Mental Illnesses &  
Mental Health Struggles  
are an "US" thing.

And there's no shame in  
that.

## So how can we support each other & our neighbors better?

- Church-Wide Change (normalize)
- Support
- Referrals/Linking
- Accompaniment on the journey
- Support the Support People

