

Look around your congregation next Sabbath. You'd never suspect that *one in five adults (U.S.) are struggling with depression, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and other mental illnesses.*

Recent studies show 60% of people with mental health issues go to their pastor **first** for help, and pastors are the least effective in providing appropriate support and referral information. A 2008 study in Indiana University disclosed that 32% of people with mental disorder counseled by their pastor were told mental disorders are spiritual in nature.

As the role of ministry intensifies for the pastor, it is vital that he/she is prepared proficiently as well as spiritually to handle challenges people with mental illness face; and help them (and their families) find resources and support. This recognition became more crucial in Atlanta, GA, when in 2003 a young woman with schizophrenia killed her pastor, mother, and herself in the church sanctuary before church services early one Sunday a.m. She had just been released from a mental health facility the night before. She had been an usher, choir member, and had known the pastor for 30 years.

The cause of mental illness is not fully understood. Some factors may include a biochemical imbalance in the brain, heredity, stress, recreational drug use, or abuse. Mental illness is often temporary, and people with mental illness have normal, intellectual capacities. Severely ill people are rational as much of the time as they are symptomatic or psychotic.

"Disabled people live on the edge. Some of us live so closely to the edge that our very lives hang in the balance."

(Joni Eareckson Tada – CDDP News, Autumn, 2003)

The different forms of mental illness are: (1) schizophrenia; (2) dementia/alzheimer's; (3) mood disorders – depression, bipolar and suicide; (4) anxiety disorders – panic attack, phobias, obsessive compulsion and post traumatic stress;(5) personality disorders – antisocial, paranoid and schizoid, narcissistic, histrionic, dependant and avoidant; (6) eating disorders; (7) autism; and (8) attention deficit/ hyperactivity.

Judy Boher-Patrick, a Christian psychiatrist and presenter at the 2009 Frontline Mental Health Interfaith Conference reported four top mental disorders seen in our churches:

1. Depression – biological and situational. We must understand "why" people are depressed. **What you believe about depression impacts your counsel to them.** 70% of church members believe depression is a sign of personal weakness.
2. Anxiety – Manifested as panic disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, and PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). One in five military men and women who served in Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from major depression or PTSD.
3. Bipolar – (manic depression). These people exhibit racing thoughts, are talkative and hyper-sexual.
4. Borderline Personality Disorders. There are 11 personality disorders. There is no pill for treatment. Long term psychotherapy helps.

Two disorders that wreck havoc and chaos in the church:

1. Passive Aggressive Narcissm – will manipulate the truth and are self-absorbed. “It’s All about me”
2. Borderline Personality Disorder – These people have volatile relationships – one minute they are your best friend – the next your worst enemy.

The pastor's concern and interest is very important to the person, even if he/she is unable to show it. The pastor should convey an accepting, friendly, understanding and genuine manner and not be judgmental. He/she can give an understanding response to the person's concern, be a resource for information and referrals, focus on the person’s strengths, and remind the person that God care for him/her.

Helpful websites:

www.pathways2promise.org

www.mentalhealthministries.net

www.nimh.nih.gov



Material compiled from Pathways To Promise Manual, handouts; and National Institute of Mental Health.

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PASTORAL CARE FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

