

FAITH AND HOPE MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER

www.faithandhopeministries.net
~ helping our communities
of faith serve those with
mental illness ~

September 2011



Thank You!

To Classis Quinte for extending our funding for one more year! We now need your church's support more than ever to continue this ministry beyond this year!

We welcome Laura Vanderherberg, from Living Hope Church in Peterborough to share with you her experience with bi-polar:

Bipolar: A journey of struggle, endurance and hope



Bipolar affects more than just the individual who is diagnosed, it affects the family and community around the person. I was diagnosed with bipolar in January of 2008. While it was somewhat of a relief to my family and I to finally discover what was going on, it was also a time of grieving the loss of normalcy. I remember going for a walk with my parents and having my mom say to me that she was so sorry that this had happened to me. At first all I could feel was shame and sadness.

As I began to wrestle with my diagnosis, I embarked on a path of struggle, endurance and hope. Along the way I have learned some important lessons which I would like to share not just for the person with bipolar but also for the family and community surrounding that person. I am not a social worker or therapist so none of what I am saying is from a professional standpoint. I am just a fellow traveler, with a few things to say.

There is a grieving period after finding out you are a person living with bipolar, sometimes you question God or look for healing that doesn't usually happen. You may hate medication because of the side effects and how it takes away your creativity. I have personally gone off medication with disastrous consequences. I have also sought healing and that didn't happen. It has taken me some years to accept that I have bipolar. But once you accept it you can also learn how to live with it. You may also see how God can use you in spite of it and because of it.

So what is bipolar? When undiagnosed it is being in the state of either mania or depression. Mania is a state of feeling invincible and having the ability to do everything at once. The person may have mythic ideas about themselves, that they are divine or somehow a part of a major conspiracy. The person can have a lot of energy and creativity but it is unorganized creativity. Depression on the other hand is a state of sadness, low motivation and energy and sometimes suicidal thoughts. Both of these states can be very dangerous, so it is important that the person who is living with bipolar stay on their medication and work with their psychiatrist; which is a reality that I have also had to come to accept.

I have learned the importance of reaching out when you are low or depressed. It's a hard thing to do, especially because you feel like a burden to people. But if you spread it around and call different people at different times it's not so heavy on them. For example, a couple of weeks ago I was feeling really low, I was crying and didn't feel like I could accomplish the tasks of my day. I called my parents and they suggested I call a friend to come over. I called my friend Amy and she was busy, then I called my friend Evan and he came over right away and we had tea and went for a walk. We didn't talk about why I was feeling low we just talked about the dentist or something like that. Afterwards I was able to get my tasks done and go about my day.

I have learned the hard way that there also needs to be safe guards in place when you are living with bipolar because you can experience mania. It can easily lead to psychosis which is where you are beginning to believe delusions and see hallucinations. It is important that if the person is manic they should not be left alone and they most likely need to go to the hospital and stay there. If they are off their medication for whatever reason they really should be admitted because medication doesn't kick in for a bit.

An idea that I learned from Julie my case worker was to write myself a letter on a day I felt great to myself on a day I wasn't feeling well. It started out saying, "Dear friend, I know you aren't feeling good today and you don't want to leave the house or the bed you lie in. This will pass, maybe not today but someday soon you will feel yourself again. Remember that you are a wonderful person with lots to give. You are a good friend, daughter, aunt and sister....." Then it goes on to suggest

reaching out to someone and it gives a list of names. This has been really helpful.

I have been going to a life coach for the last three or four months because I was feeling stuck and needed help moving forward. She pointed out to me that I was feeling self pity which was stopping me from moving forward. Instead she suggested a better response would be having curiosity about situations. The reason curiosity is a better approach is because it is non-emotional and it is rational. I have been using that when I feel overwhelmed or start to feel self pity come over me. I ask myself, "what is causing me to feel this way, why am I reacting like this?"

One suggestion is to get involved with serving your community somehow. Over lunch at our favorite café my mom suggested that I find a place to serve. She said it would help me get out of myself and realize that there are other people in my community far worse off than me. I now volunteer at a food bank every week and I love it. Among the other volunteers I have found a place where I am loved and appreciated. I also get to serve those in need and it is rewarding but also challenging to see the poverty of my city right in front of my face.

Bipolar is not something I wished for, but it is something I have come to accept. I live day by day with God's help and the help of my community. Just this morning I was feeling low and I asked my friend if I could come over to her house because I didn't want to be alone. Just being able to talk and laugh got me out of my funk. I am grateful to everyone in my life that actively helps me live with this illness. If you have bipolar I encourage you to reach out and build community around you. If you are on the outside looking in, I encourage you to be that person who is a good friend or family member to the person living with bipolar.

We are now beginning to plan for our next **Faith and Hope Conference on NOV. 12, 2012, in Cobourg, ON.** Keep this date open. Dr. Michael Pare from Toronto will be our key note speaker. We will have breakout speakers available again. We've had attendances between 200-300 people for these conferences. You won't want to miss this one!

We need your help: If you would like to be on the planning team for this conference please call June at 905-623-9901 or Winnie 866-292-3223.

We are available to speak to your youth group, senior's group, men or women's groups, elders and deacons. We can also set you up with our new Let's Talk! small group Bible study. It has blessed other groups and now support groups are meeting.

News Flash!

We are very pleased to announce that we have just received **Charitable Status!**

Soon we will be able to issue receipts for donations. Please call Lisa at 613-475-3401 if you would like to donate to this ministry.

Greetings from the Chairperson:

Imtiaz Ahmed

Faith and Hope Ministries (FHM) continues to help congregations become more sensitive to the needs of people in their congregations who experience mental illness. More and more churches are coming to see that mental illness has no boundaries. From personal experience depression can be life changing.

FHM has hosted two successful conferences and are planning another one for 2012 and we need many volunteers to help in this endeavour. Our resource consultants, June Zwier and Winnie Visser have developed small group resource material for churches to use, titled "Let's Talk: Breaking the Silence Around Mental Illnesses in Our Communities of Faith". June and Winnie would be willing to talk to your church about it.

2011 has been a challenging year for the team. However, with hard work we now have our own charitable status number allowing us to give out tax receipts for donations made directly to the ministry. Our immediate challenge is to become financially self sufficient. Our greatest desire is to help our Classis of congregations to better understand mental illness and be a model for other Classis' in the CRCNA as well as other churches. We are also working closely with the Disabilities Concerns Mental Health Task Force exploring ways to expand resource accessibility in our denomination.

We are grateful and want to thank the many churches for praying for this ministry and assisting us by adding us to their collection schedule.

We are always looking for new Board members. June and Winnie look forward to come to your congregation or group. Why not give them a call?

Watch for another story of a mother and daughter as they write about their experience with bi-polar in the October edition of the BANNER.

**Blessings and much encouragement,
from your Faith and Hope Ministry Resource Team:**

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