

SUNSHINE FROM DARKNESS SETTING US FREE FROM THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS

What is mental illness?

Mental illnesses are disturbances in emotions, thinking and behaviour that cause distress and that interfere with functioning at school or work and cause problems in relationships.

Although the causes of mental illnesses are not fully known research shows that genetic and biological factors often are involved. However, the amount of support that people receive can make a difference.

Current Realities

Mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some time through a family member, friend or colleague.

20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

In Canada only one out of five children who need mental health services receive them.¹

Over 80% of adults with mental illnesses are not receiving appropriate treatment.²

Effective treatments are available today and the support of caring people in the local congregation can often help lead a person to seek and accept effective treatment. Conversely stigma is often a barrier to accessing treatment.

"...If not for the grace of God and the kindness of one friend...I wouldn't be here today. It wasn't until I had the courage to accept that I did have a mental disorder...that I needed help,...that I started to get better." Margaret Trudeau

What We Can Do?

Offer a prayer in regular worship – Order resources from MCC Canada – Invite a parishioner to contribute an article for the newsletter – Hold a forum open to the public – Develop a support group – Connect with your local mental health resources.

Why We Should Do It?

Research shows that people with mental illness are just as interested in faith and spirituality as the rest of the population. However, they often do not feel accepted by the local congregation.

Treatments for mental illnesses, such as anxiety disorders, depression and schizophrenia are equally effective or more effective than many treatments for heart problems and other medical problems.³

People with mental illness can make important contributions to the community.

People such as Margaret Trudeau, Elizabeth Manley, Ron Ellis, Jim Carrey, Sir John A. MacDonald and Michael Wilson all have had mental illnesses, including Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia.

Opportunities to participate in supportive communities help people to recover from mental illness.⁴

Our faith communities can be enriched by the expressions of faith and by the life stories of people with mental illness, *if we will listen.*

¹The Report on Mental Illness in Canada, October 2002

²P. Wang and colleagues, *American Journal of Public Health*, January 2002

³The National Foundation for Brain Research

⁴C. Harding and J. Zabiner, in *Psychological and Social Aspects of Psychiatric Disability* (Edited by LeRoy Spaniol), 1997