

Mental Health in an Unequal World

World Mental Health Day

Sunday 10th October 2021



Since 1992, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recognised 10th October as World Mental Health Day. Following a global vote, this year's theme has been agreed to be 'Mental Health in an Unequal World'.

Throughout God's world, economic disparities go hand in hand with social and health inequalities. As the World Federation for Mental Health has observed¹:

'2020 highlighted inequalities due to race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, and the lack of respect for human rights in many countries, including for people living with mental health conditions. Such inequalities have an impact on people's mental health.'

Whilst the Federation is reflecting on a global scale, some of these inequalities are reflected within the UK and even within our diocese.

Covid-19 held a mirror up to this by affecting those of older years, those from BAME backgrounds and those with complex health conditions. Lockdowns and shielding measures particularly impacted individuals living on their own, people in residential care, and those living with existing mental ill-health conditions.

People running small and medium enterprises (SMEs), those whose jobs were furloughed or lost altogether, and many who are dependent on state support to make ends meet, lived with heightened anxiety and stress. Many face uncertain futures, simply around how to make ends meet and provide for themselves and their families. Their stress and anxiety continue to rise.

Now, as we relax a little, we are beginning to see that the mental health of younger people, whose lives and education has been disrupted in fundamental ways, has deteriorated alarmingly.

Evidence is growing that inequalities which pre-existed Covid-19 are becoming both wider and more evident in all parts of the country, in all parts of the world. Within the UK, we have been blessed to have had a steady supply of good vaccines with which to inoculate and protect around 90% of the population. But in July, the journal *Nature* stated online²:

'But so far, more than 80% of the doses have gone to people in high-income and upper-middle-income countries. Only 1% of people in low-income countries have been given at least one dose, according to the website *Our World in Data*.'

Churches and other faith groups have shown remarkable resilience during the pandemic. There are many stories of inspirational efforts by lay and ordained people to maintain pastoral contact, provide practical help and nurture spiritual hope in creative ways. Even as we come back together in person, joy is tinged with anxiety, pleasure with exhaustion. We talk about a new normal, yet normality differs so widely from person to person and context to context.

By God's grace, World Mental Health Day 2021 falls on a Sunday. Perhaps this year more than ever, it offers an opportunity to us to reflect on mental health in general and the theme 'Mental Health in an Unequal World' in particular.

¹ <https://wfmh.global/2021-world-mental-health-global-awareness-campaign-world-mental-health-day-theme/>

² <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01762-w>

The resources that follow are just that – resources and suggestions. They are neither obligatory nor comprehensive. We hope they are a starting point for you to consider if and how you might use 10th October 2021 to think about the mental health of God’s creation, either globally or locally, or both.

Please use them or reject them and find your own. When you worship together as a community on 10th October, we hope you will feel able to at least acknowledge before God that we are always the sum of all our parts – physical, mental, emotional, psychological and, perhaps above all, spiritual. And that when one part is in pain, the whole body suffers. And such pain is always more acute when inequality plays a role.

Finally, these words from John Swinton - Chair in Divinity and Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen and a mental health and learning disability nurse – the author of *Finding Jesus in the Storm*³, offer hope and inspiration:

‘People living with mental health challenges just want to be understood, respected, and treated with love and kindness. Such kindness is the essence of healing and the substance of Jesus promise of life in all its fulness. Mental health ministry means finding a way to exhibit some extraordinary human kindness.... The church is meant to specialise in human kindness, isn’t it? There is tremendous power and beauty in the suggestion that church is called to be a specialist in human kindness. Small acts of kindness, tenderness and thoughtfulness bring healing. It’s really not that complicated’.

³ Swinton J., *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges*, (2020), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Scripture – all text is taken from the NRSV

Old Testament

1 Kings 19, 1-12

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

2 Kings 5, 1-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favour with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, 'If only my lord

Reflections

Elijah is stressed, anxious and exhausted. After his confrontation with the priests of Baal, he has made enemies of Ahab and Jezebel. They seek revenge. So Elijah flees.

At Beer-sheba, he takes stock; he doesn't like what he sees in himself. He's ashamed of the violence that stems from his zealotry, to the extent that he asks to be relieved of his pain. Today, we might term that as 'suicidal ideation', even if Elijah doesn't want to act on it.

Instead of death, in a series of spiritual encounters, he is encouraged to come face to face with himself, his behaviour and with God.

Once he can acknowledge what he has done, Elijah can face his shame. He digs deep down into his soul, the essence of his being. And as he does, he finds himself as he finds God in the still small voice of absolute silence.

Elijah locates his contemplative self and, at its heart, a peace that passes his understanding.

Reflections

This is a story of two powerful men who are suspicious of each other. Psychologically, both Naaman and Joram (probably king of Israel at the time) are stressed – Naaman with his skin

were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.’ So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, ‘Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.’

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, ‘When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.’ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, ‘Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.’

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, ‘Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.’ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.’ But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, ‘I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?’ He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, ‘Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, “Wash, and be clean”?’ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Psalm 22, 1-2

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

Psalm 42, 9-10

I say to God, my rock,

‘Why have you forgotten me?

Why must I walk about mournfully

condition and Joram at being asked to do what seems impossible. The stress comes out as impatience and anger. They are at loggerheads.

How often do we react like that, without realising what lies behind our behaviours? It’s often referred to, somewhat pejoratively, as ‘acting out’.

It takes something, and someone, to break this cycle of pride. First the unnamed servant-girl who suggests a way out; second the unnamed messenger from Elisha who defines the solution; third the unnamed servants who persuade Naaman to do what is suggested.

How often do our psychological, mental and even spiritual disease get in the way of our path to wholeness and healing? And how often is it those who have nothing to defend who can see more clearly than we can?

Perhaps in God’s kingdom, inequality of status is turned on its head.

Reflections

Verses from two psalms that speak of despair and a sense of feeling abandoned by God and by life.

In the despair of the last hours of his human life, Jesus quotes one or both of these psalms from the cross, at least as recorded by Mark and Matthew.

because the enemy oppresses me?’

As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
‘Where is your God?’

If none of these resonate with you, perhaps think about the experiences of some of the following:

Naomi (in the Book of Ruth)

In losing her husband and both sons to death, Naomi’s grief is profound, even overwhelming. How many similar stories are there around the coronavirus? With very little status as a widow, Naomi’s story is the search for meaning through the lens of her grief and loss; a story of bereavement, bitterness and the questions “why me?” and “why do bad things happen to good people?”

Saul (1 Samuel 9 to the end of the book)

The biblical account of Saul’s life and reign is one of a man anointed to absolute temporal power, with the hope of a people behind him; and then his descent into fear, distrust, paranoia, and depression. Saul trusts to begin with and then it drops away; at his most distressed, it is only the kindness and music of David that can soothe and restore him, even if it is only for a while. It’s a reminder that, although inequalities play a part in how mental ill-health is distributed, no-one is immune simply because of their status or role.

Job

Job has everything, loses it all and then has to come to terms with these events. But, most of all, he has to come to terms with himself. His story is a profoundly human tale, that goes beyond time and location; a search for oneself that is found not in the trappings of life, but in his attitudes to God, to others, and ultimately to himself.

Jonah

However we understand the story of Jonah, the central character displays many characteristics that define his mental health. Jonah

The psalmists who penned these heart-rending words knew what it was to be in despair, taunted and humiliated. Goodness knows how damaged their spiritual and mental health must have been.

And yet, in the end, they are able to recall that help lies in reaching out beyond themselves. Sadly, not everyone can always make that connection.

Reflections

Exploring mental, psychological and spiritual health and distress through the stories of characters within the Bible can often produce surprising results. We are used to ‘theologising’ these stories, looking for what they tell us about God.

Whether they are objectively true accounts, myths or metaphors, so many are stories that capture human experiences and challenges, strengths and weaknesses. When the writer’s theological top layer is stripped back, the human story jumps out and we often find it can chime with our own experiences.

runs away from something that he doesn't wish to face. He flees into a place of darkness, symbolised by the belly of the whale. Can he ever escape? Jonah's judgmental sense of who deserves what is characteristic of one aspect of mental ill-health - that in extreme distress it's often easier to see things dualistically outside ourselves than come to terms with imperfection in ourselves.

Jeremiah

The prophetic book that bears Jeremiah's name contains one of the most rounded pictures of any person within the Hebrew Scriptures. Jeremiah is thrust into a role that he probably didn't want, with a character that made public prophecy always a challenge. Described as the 'sad' prophet, Jeremiah is frequently taunted, persecuted and humiliated. Despite this, he manages to hold onto a sense of who he is, even if that is not always who he might wish to be. Like Job, Jeremiah's character offers insights into the tenacity needed to cope with long-term mental distress.

New Testament

Mark 5, 1-20 (also Matthew 8, 28-34 and Luke 8, 26-39)

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Luke 8, 1-2 and John 20, 11-18

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil

Reflections

This is perhaps the most detailed instance of mental ill-health in all four Gospels. Here is a man (not a demoniac – that is to label him) who has been scapegoated by the community to live in a place of the dead. To make it worse, he's tied up like an animal. He is clearly in terrible distress, persecuted by his thoughts and inner voices and he continuously self-harms.

Unlike the villagers, who probably installed him in the tombs out of ignorance and fear, Jesus comes to him in love.

He acknowledges his identity by asking his name; gives him dignity by clothing him; offers him support by sitting and spending time with him; suggests that his health will be improved by integrating himself back in the community; and last, but not least, challenges the community to have a change of heart and welcome Legion back home.

With whom do we identify in this story?

Reflections

Mary is described as having been beset by mental distress or ill-health (an interpretation of the Biblical use of 'demons' and 'evil spirits'). Although we don't know

spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out:

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

We are indebted to Bishop Michael for seeing the relevance of these two passages to the subject of mental health. He reflected on them at a diocesan day on mental health in 2018.

Luke 22, 54-62 and John 21, 15-17

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, 'This man also was with him.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.' A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!' Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, 'Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!' At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

how, she finds her way back to health, a reminder to us that not all experiences of acute mental ill-health condemn the sufferer to long-term distress.

And it's the same Mary, not one of the main all-male group of disciples, who first recognises the post-Resurrection Jesus. As Bishop Michael asked those who heard his reflection 'where would we be without her?'

Indeed, the same could well be asked of anyone who experiences, or lives with, mental ill-health. The answer is often a surprising one, and by no means always negative!

Reflections

Shame is a toxic experience and a frequent component of mental ill-health.

Peter is both shamed and ashamed in Luke's account of his denial. He is directly shamed when Jesus looks at him. His denial is no longer a private matter. Peter is ashamed as the waves of disgrace and humiliation wash over him. He weeps as he crumbles.

Peter's restoration, following a breakfast meal, is one of the most powerful acts of healing in the gospels. By asking Peter the same question – 'do you love me?' – three times, Jesus gives

He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.

Acts of the Apostles 9, 1-19

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Peter the opportunities to come to terms with his shame, even if Peter can't grasp it immediately.

Often it seems far easier for God to forgive us than it is for us to forgive ourselves.

Reflections

The theological story of Saul's conversion experience is also a gripping human story of what is sometimes referred to as a mental breakdown.

It is hard to overestimate the stress that Saul must have been in as he travelled from Jerusalem to Damascus. His whole life is defined by how good he is at enforcing orthodoxy, to the point that he has neglected, perhaps even forgotten, who he really is as the man from Tarsus.

He's wearing a mask. In the end, it's too much for him to maintain and he shatters. Today's medical profession might well call this a 'psychotic episode' and prescribe powerful medication.

However, Saul's help comes from his internal conversation with God which leads to a reflection on his behaviour and essential character; plus the kindness of Ananias who tended to his more physical needs. Once equilibrium was restored, so too was Saul.

This experience, above all others, sets the tone for his subsequent life and ministry; something that so often happens after a major emotional, psychological and/or spiritual experience.

Prayer and intercessions

Many churches will wish to use their own resources, knowing their particular local context. That is likely to resonate with congregations in general and individuals in particular.

Many churches will have gifted intercessors, both lay and ordained, who have the skills and the wish to formulate their own intercessions, scripted or extemporaneous. We would encourage you to do whatever you feel is appropriate to bring the subject of mental health, and the inequalities associated with it, in prayer for God and God's people.

However, we hope the following might also be of interest or help.

Intercessions for an un Equal World

Loving God, in a world where there is such inequality in health and social care, we pray for fairer access to all health services, in particular services supporting mental health.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Listening God, in a world where there are still people experiencing the stigma of discrimination in mental health, we pray for a better understanding of mental illness and your guiding hand in how we can all work together to eliminate discrimination.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Just God, in a world where there are so many with very little struggling with accessing services, we pray that unmet needs are recognised and everyone needing care will receive the support they need to live life to the full once again.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Guiding God, in a world where we fail to recognise the impact that mental illness had on families and loved ones, we pray that care may be integrated into all aspects of life and considered no differently to any offer of support.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Compassionate God, in a world where many are socially isolated, we pray that you will show us ways to come alongside others who need a friend, helping us to offer the hand of friendship.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Let your church be a place of healing, concern and love for all people. Help us to reach out and care for every one of your children with compassion and without judgement. Be always in our midst as we seek to bring in your Kingdom.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

From Chelmsford Cathedral, a prayer for Mental Health Week, usually marked in May

Loving God, we pray for those who are confronted by the sadness, ambiguity and confusion of mental illness, and those upon whom they depend for attention and compassionate care. Look with mercy on all whose afflictions bring them weakness, distress confusion or isolation. Provide them homes of dignity and peace, give to them understanding helpers and the willingness to accept help. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From the 'Inclusive Church' website

<https://www.inclusive-church.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/prayers-on-a-mental-health-theme.pdf>

The author of the first two prayers, Christopher Newell, is an experienced mental health chaplain whose work has focused on community care.

A Prayer for World Mental Health Day

Tender God, Your gentle and kind-hearted love waits for us in the darkness and shields us from the light when it feels too overwhelming. We remember today all those who live in the depths of depression. Continue to cherish us all when we find it so difficult to cherish ourselves. Enable us to discover companions of compassion who will abide with us, as you abide in all things and in all places where the heart and mind aches for peace and a place of rest from the storm. We ask this in the name of our brother and friend, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Prayer for Peace

When creation is overcome by the chaos from which it springs,
peace be with you.
When the sweet darkness of sleep never comes,
peace be with you.
When the light of the day overwhelms you,
peace be with you.
In the broken heart and risen body of Christ,
peace be with you.

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A Blessing Prayer

May the Lord God Bless you each step of Life's way.

May you learn each day to open yourself to love and the blessings of love.

May you find a stick to lean on when the road is hard - and not use the stick to beat yourself.

May you be blessed with life's abundance and blessed in poor days too, learning again what really matters, what lasts.

May you never give in to despair or the lie that nothing can change.

May you find ways of life and walk them with courage, knowing that every step is within the heart of Christ who holds all our days in love.

© Revd Dr Christopher Jenkins

From an anonymous source

For those with depression and anxiety

Ever-loving source of Life,

as you know the hairs on our heads,

so too you know all that we feel:

in the darkness of our depression, sit alongside us;

at the height of our anxiety, calm our panic;

and in the midst of our fear, hold us tight,

so that we may not lose ourselves in our emotions

but find ourselves in your love. Amen.

In the face of inequality

Open our eyes, O Lord,

to the ways we discriminate and oppress

through our words and actions.

Challenge us to embrace difference,

share our blessings and welcome the stranger,

that, reflecting the values of your kingdom,

and the generosity of your Son,

we may play our part

in fostering sound mental health

within a healthy world. Amen.

A blessing

Bless each of us here today,

our bodies, minds and spirits,

in the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,

that glorious Trinity of Love

in which there is no discrimination

and through which all can flourish.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

The author of these intercessions is the Church of England National Going for Growth (Children and Youth) Adviser. Mary authored them to be deliberately sparse in word, allowing local needs to be added and suggesting that a period of silence might be kept between the subject of the prayer and the bidding.

They may of course be subject to a personalised introduction and a concluding summary.

O Lord our God, for those of us whose lives are strained and stressed.....

Hear our prayer

and pour out your peace.

For those of us whose hold on life is fragile.....

Hear our prayer

and pour out your peace.

For those of us whose illness makes them vulnerable.....

Hear our prayer

and pour out your peace.

For those of us whose families struggle to understand them.....

Hear our prayer

and pour out your peace.

For families and friends, nurses, doctors and therapists and all who seek to walk alongside the stressed and strained, the vulnerable and the fragile.....

Hear our prayer

and pour out your peace.

O Lord our God, for all whose lives are in turmoil through the effects of mental illness.....

Hear our prayer

and pour out your peace.

© Mary Hawes

Psalms

In an article on mental health in the *Church Times* issue of 13th August 2021, Revd Jean Fletcher, a retired mental health chaplain and Methodist minister, suggested the relevance of these psalms for the subject of mental health:

- 4 a psalm of human questions in the midst of distress
- 13 another psalm that starts with questions, this time around abandonment
- 30 hope overcoming distress, whilst not denying the latter as a human experience
- 34 holding fast to God, even in the midst of distress, can lead to health
- 40 like, psalm 34, God is a rock in the experience of pain and suffering
- 42 a recognition of the effects of sorrow, mourning and what could be described as depression
- 46 the penultimate verse echoes Elijah's experience in the words 'be still, and know that I am God'
- 116 knowing that we are heard can be the start of our healing journey
- 130 how many of us can resonate with the opening words - 'out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;'
- 131 the imagery internal stillness and peace as a cherished baby is powerful and thought-provoking
- 139 a challenge for us all to be at peace with ourselves and with our God
- 145 a reminder of the eternal, indiscriminate love of God, in whatever state we find ourselves

Praise

We are including what we hope is an appropriate selection of music and praise, from which it will be possible for you to select some that will compliment the context of your worship. Although they are shown as being taken from a limited number of hymn and praise books, many are to be found more widely and online, subject to copyright acknowledgement.

Hymn suggestions from 'Inclusive church' website

<https://www.inclusive-church.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Hymns-songs-and-chants-MHM.pdf>

Hymns Old and New, New Anglican: 1996 edition

An upper room did our lord prepare
It's me O Lord standing in the name of prayer
I the lord of sea and sky
Jesus Christ is waiting

Hymns Old and New, New Anglican: 1996, 2000 & subsequent editions

A new commandment I give unto you	Freedom dance and sing
Be still for the presence	Do not be afraid
All the nations of the earth	For the fruits of his creation
Be thou my vision	Gather around for the table is spread
Bread is blessed and broken	Heaven shall not wait
Brother, Sister let me serve you	When God almighty came to earth
Cloth for the cradle	Lord of the dance
Christ's is the world - a touching place	Inspired by love and anger
Colours of day	Jesus took a piece of bread

Jubilate
Kum Ba yah
Let there be love
Lord of hopefulness
Make me a channel of your peace
Now the green blade riseth

One more step along the world
O lord all the world belongs to you
We will lay our burden down
Will you come and follow me
Who would think

2000 & subsequent editions

O Love that wilt not let me go
Take this moment time and space
When I needed a neighbour
Let us build a house where love can dwell (All are welcome)
Longing for light we wait in the darkness (Christ be our light)
Help us to help each other
Lord God you meet us, healer of the sick

Mission Praise Complete

Beauty for brokenness
From heaven you came

Other

Blessed are the humble	Graham Kendrick
Let the world be changed	Garth Hewitt
Happy to share happy to bear	Garth Hewitt
Justice like a river	Garth Hewitt
Be the hands of Jesus	Garth Hewitt
Remembrance	Matt Redman

Chants

At a reflective time, like World Mental Health Day, chants can have a particular resonance in creating a prayerful and contemplative atmosphere in which to offer concerns around mental health.

Taizé Chants

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom
O Lord, hear my prayer
Within our darkest night
By night we hasten in darkness
Lord Jesus Christ, your light shines within us

Iona chants

Take, O take, me as I am
Kindle a flame to lighten the dark

Other

Be still and know that I am God	Anonymous
Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm	Margaret Rizza

Additional Resources

Below is a brief liturgy, adapted from *New Patterns of Worship*, that can serve as an act of worship in itself or as a framework for adaption with those who are in pain or distress:

Greeting:

Leader We meet in the presence of God

All **who knows our needs, hears our cries, feels our pain and heals our wounds.**

Opening Prayer:

Leader Be with us, Spirit of God;

All **nothing can separate us from your love.**

Leader Breathe on us, breath of God;

All **bring strength, healing and peace.**

Silence

Leader The Lord is here.

All **His Spirit is with us.**

Confession and Absolution:

All **We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden, to ask for his forgiveness and grace.**

Silence

Leader May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us to himself
and cleanse us from all our sins,
that we behold the glory of his Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Psalms

Some from the list above, or others as deemed appropriate, can be said

The Peace

Leader 'Jesus said: 'Love one another. As I have loved you, so you are to love one another'
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All **And also with you.**

A time of prayer could be held at this point, either in silence or with biddings, with or without the lighting of candles or other simple symbolic actions

Blessing

Leader May God give you
his comfort and peace,
his light and his joy,
in this world and the next;
and the blessing...

With slight adjustment in the wording, this blessing could be said by all to, and for, each other.