



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Able, Together

Disability Ministry happenings, support, and inspiration, from around the SEPA Synod



Welcome to Able, Together!

Hello!

Elise Seyfried (Christ's, Oreland) and I would like to welcome you to our very first issue of "Able, Together," a quarterly newsletter in support of disability ministry within the SEPA Synod. We hope to support, inspire, and walk together in faith with anyone experiencing disability, whether first-hand, as a caregiver, or as a concerned friend or family member.

Disability comes in many forms and has many definitions. From developmental disability to chronic illness, from mental health concerns to vision or hearing challenges, there is nobody whose life will not be touched in some way by disability. So, let's not go it alone. Let's see what cool ministries are up and running in our area, with articles like Elise Seyfried's "Beating the Stigma." Let's grow and learn through the sharing of personal experience, such as HA's (Trinity Lutheran, Lansdale)' "But You're So Young!" And, in upcoming months, we will share practical tips from local Lutherans who work in related fields, like our "Putty in the Pews" interview, in the works with Occupational Therapist Jill Gibbons Rose (St. John's Lutheran, Sumneytown.) And let's nourish our souls with guest devotions, written from the heart by SEPA pastors and leaders.

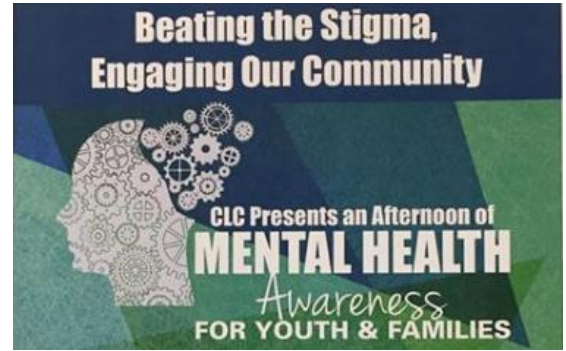
I write this to you from beneath my trusty pink quilt, in great hope and excitement for what this newsletter can bring. Though my physical energy may be zapped from another day with chronic vestibular illness, my spirit is abuzz with joy for this opportunity. As a chronic illness warrior and an autism spectrum mom, it is my sincere wish that "Able, Together" will bring us together to truly find hope, to fully participate in the body of Christ, and to shout from the rooftops that all are welcome and cherished here.

--Kathleen Murphy (Trinity, Lansdale)

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Beating the Stigma, Engaging Our Community

It was a dream of members of a small support group at Christ's Lutheran Church in Oreland. Our group is comprised of youth with mental health issues, and the families who love them. As Director of Spiritual Formation at Christ's Lutheran (and as someone who lives with bipolar disorder), I have long wanted to gather these folks to share information and resources—and our stories and struggles too. The issues in our group are as varied as mental illness itself: cutting and other self-harm, suicide attempts, PTSD, anorexia, anxiety, depression, OCD. One couple has a daughter who is finally in a good place; another mom's daughter has been repeatedly hospitalized and is not doing well. Wherever we are in this journey, it has been important to travel together.



And so, at a recent group meeting, I asked what we as a church could do to further support them. The immediate response? Host a mental health awareness event, and invite every church in the SEPA synod, plus the surrounding community. Beating the stigma begins with understanding, and too many people just don't understand—even though virtually everyone's life is touched in some way by mental illness, and a stunning 20% of young people ages 18 and under have a serious mental health issue.

A speaker, Dr. George James from Council for Relationships, was contacted. Thrivent Financial sponsored the event, to cover publicity and other costs so that we could offer this afternoon free of charge. The word got out. Then we waited, having no idea how many to expect.

The event took place on Sunday, November 6th. Despite the Eagles game occurring at the same time, we had a good number of people, both from our church and elsewhere. Dr. James shared his professional perspective, emphasizing the need for caregivers to also take care of themselves. But it was the sharing of the other speakers that made this event so important. Two of our parents spoke, and one very courageous young teen as well. By being so open and honest, they helped the attendees to better understand the struggles they face.

We are determined that this will not be a "once-and-done" for our church and community. The need is great, and, as one group member put it, "what is a church for, if it does not care for those who are suffering?" We want to be a church that cares for all people, especially those in need of extra love and support. One of our teens reminded the group: "I am not my diagnosis." We are, all of us, much loved children of God, with so much to offer the world. Step by step, we hope to finally eliminate the stigma of mental illness for good.

--Elise Seyfried (Christ's, Oreland)

Disability Etiquette: It's Just Respect!

Should you pet someone's service dog? How about shaking hands with a person who has a prosthetic arm? Touching someone's wheelchair--yes or no? We mean well, but sometimes it's hard to figure out the right thing to do when we are interacting with our brothers and sisters who have disabilities.

Enter a wonderful program from MossRehab--disability etiquette training for YOUR church! Upon request, Moss will send a trained professional to teach members of your congregation the "do's and don'ts" of interacting and communicating with persons who have disabilities.

"If you ever feel like you'd like to help someone who has a disability, ask that person if he/she wants your help and then ask the person how you can help," says Julie Hensler Cullen, MossRehab's director of quality and education.



Julie Hensler Cullen, Director of Quality and Education at MossRehab, with patient Rachel

Julie shares a quote she has read:

"The worst thing about having a disability is that people meet IT before they meet YOU."

As people of faith, we are called to help make EVERYONE feel safe, included and respected! To contact Moss for more information and scheduling:

[MossRehab Disability Etiquette](#)

Meanwhile, check out the "It's Just Respect!" video series:

["It's Just Respect" video series on YouTube](#)



But You're So Young....

"Why do you have this? You're too young to have this."

I can't tell you how many times someone has asked me something like that after telling them I have arthritis, another word for joint pain. I'm a senior in high school, but I've had chronic joint pain since sixth grade. Participating in typical activities throughout my school years like camp, youth group, and even field trips have been exceedingly difficult for me. Unfortunately, a lot of the time, these normal social activities would involve something physically taxing for me; whether it was a game of dodgeball, bowling, or even just walking around a museum for a couple of hours, joint pain would always make an unwelcome appearance.

It's unusual to hear of someone having an ailment that doesn't "fit". When people think of arthritis, the elderly usually come to mind first. Typically, osteoarthritis or "wear and tear" (from overuse of the joints) arthritis, affects patients over the age of 60. I, however, have lupus, a disease of which rheumatoid arthritis is a symptom. Unlike osteoarthritis, both rheumatoid arthritis and lupus are autoimmune disorders, which means the body attacks itself. There is no specific age range they are developed, just luck of the draw. Typically, lupus and arthritis sufferers can develop symptoms during mid-teenage years, but that is just a general common parameter and they can appear at any age.

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Disability Ministry Devotion

Our world today is filled with some pretty high standards for what is beautiful, what is truthful, what is good. We are bombarded by messages, advertisements, and commercials left and right telling us that we are not beautiful enough, smart enough, strong enough, manly enough, feminine enough – that we do not fit the impossible, arbitrary standards imposed on us by a culture practically obsessed with perfection. For those of us living in the real world, perfect is an illusion. For those of us who may be different, or differently-abled, than this imaginary ideal, the pain caused by this disconnect can be profound. But the real truth is, not one person fits this imaginary ideal. We are all differently gifted, and differently abled. But our arbitrary standards of what is beautiful and what is good as a society proclaim some of us as "normal", while others are described as "dis-abled".

The thing is, the Bible tells us a different story. The idea of some ideal of the "perfect" is a distinctly un-scriptural perspective. In fact, what the whole of the biblical witness tells us is not that God created anything that was perfect, unbroken, or embodying some imaginary ideal, but rather that when God created the world and each of us "it was good." When God created each of us, we were made in the "image and likeness of God" (Gen. 1:27), "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), and we were made good. Not perfect – but good .

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This is just one example of an illness that may not be readily visible or even make sense. However, there are many people like me, who suffer from afflictions, whether visible or not. Because of that, I think that everyone should try to understand that people of any age can be ill, even if the illness seems unusual. It can be difficult to understand at first, and can be confusing and scary as well, but an ounce of kindness and an open mind about another person's ailment is enough to make someone's day.<3

- HA, (Trinity, Lansdale)

Perfect is unrealistic. Perfect is imaginary. Perfect is not actually a very Christian idea. But we are made good . Good is messy and gritty and strange. Good is birth and family and Thanksgiving dinner where we don't all agree on politics. Good is the beauty all around us. Good is the gifts of the child with special needs and the elderly woman in a wheelchair and the teenager struggling with depression but triumphing each day with another small victory. Good is real. Good is sacred. And each and every one of us is good – made in the image and likeness of God.

- Pastor Brad Burke, Assistant to the Bishop



That's right...according to the 2010 US Census, those with disabilities are not alone. Faithful ministry from, to, and alongside those with disabilities matters!



There are many Rejoicing Spirits ministries around our synod. Each month, Emmanuel Souderton's Rejoicing Spirits program starts with Sunday School. For Christmas, the rejoicers made these manger ornaments during class. Look for more information about Rejoicing Spirits in our upcoming issues.



Sometimes we march to a different drummer, but together we make a joyful noise. Tell us how your church experience helps you navigate the disabilities in your life. Send your responses to krm70@icloud.com. Let us hear from you!



Please visit our churchwide website for more information at [ELCA Disability Ministry](#)