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BREAKING THE CHAINS OF MENTAL HEALTH INEQUITY

A RESOURCE FOR FAITH LEADERS



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**BREAKING THE CHAINS OF MENTAL HEALTH INEQUITY:
A RESOURCE FOR FAITH LEADERS**

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BREAKING THE CHAINS OF MENTAL HEALTH INEQUITY

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Religion and spirituality can play significant roles in our overall mental health and well-being. The connection between faith, healing, and wholeness has a direct impact on the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about mental illness within the Black community.^{1,2} Through the Community Health Equity Alliance, a collaboration with Janssen Neuroscience, Mental Health America of Central Carolinas, i2i Center for Integrative Health, and Empower East, The Balm In Gilead has designed this awareness and educational campaign to shine a light on the challenges and inequities related to mental health among Black adults. This resource guide along with other co-created tools and materials will be disseminated to participating faith-based partners and local congregations in targeted geographic locations in North Carolina.

Through **Breaking the Chains of Mental Health Inequity**, The Balm In Gilead will provide training and technical assistance utilizing its Faith Community Mobilization Model to establish a culturally tailored and holistic response to Black adults living with mental illness, their families, and other key stakeholders.

What Are **Breaking the Chains of Mental Health Inequity Sundays**?

Breaking the Chains of Mental Health Inequity Sundays will serve as designated Sundays during the month of July within local, participating congregations serving Black adults with a dedicated focus on mental health and support for persons living with mental illness and their families.

Purpose

The purpose of **Breaking the Chains of Mental Health Inequity** is to bring attention to the tremendous burden that mental illness is having on the Black community. **Breaking the Chains of Mental Health Inequity** will utilize the power and influence of the Black pulpit to bring awareness and to distribute the facts about mental health and illness; encourage collaborations and partnerships with local community-based organizations, mental health providers, and other key stakeholders; and to provide resources to local congregations to support persons living with mental illness and their families.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Faith and community leaders are viewed as influential gatekeepers in the community. Religion, theology, and spirituality can play important roles in life satisfaction and well-being.² For individuals dealing with mental health challenges, a faith leader or clergy member is often the first person they turn to for help and support.^{1,2} In fact, 1 in 4 people who has sought care for a mental health condition have done so from a clergy member.^{1,3,4} Mental health challenges and illness can be physically, emotionally, and spiritually challenging for both those living with a diagnosis and their loved ones. Our spirituality and faith are important characteristics of who we are but also connect us to something greater than ourselves. For those struggling with mental illness, questions may arise about their faith and relationship with God.

Faith leaders can help remind individuals and their families that God is not angry with them and is not punishing them, and that He has not forgotten them. By providing words of encouragement and support, faith leaders are playing an integral role in helping Black adults in the United States, their families, and their communities maintain good overall well-being, including strong spiritual health, which is a key dimension of wellness. As trusted and initial points of contact for Black adults experiencing mental health issues, faith leaders have a unique opportunity to provide information, support, and encouragement in seeking treatment. Faith leaders can also help reduce stigma and misinformed beliefs about mental illness.

MENTAL ILLNESS OVERVIEW

Mental illness, sometimes referred to as mental health disorders, represents a wide range of health conditions related to changes or disruptions in a person's behaviors, thoughts, and/or emotions that create significant distress or an inability to function effectively in day-to-day life.^{5,6} Mental illness is more common than most people think, with 1 in 5 adults in the United States experiencing mental illness every year.^{5,6} Serious mental health conditions are a smaller and more severe subset and can have a substantial impact on 1 or more major life activities.^{5,6} Like other medical conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, mental illness is treatable and manageable with the right support and encouragement.^{6,7} Understanding the difference between mental health and mental illness is important. Mental health is the framework for individuals' perceptions, personal beliefs, and mindsets in their environment.^{2,6} The signs and symptoms of mental illness often vary and can be difficult to recognize, depending on the disorder, circumstances, and other factors.^{6,8} Mental illness can affect emotions, thinking, and behaviors.⁵

Example of signs and symptoms may include^{6,8}:

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy, or problems sleeping
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia, or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people
- Problems with alcohol or drug use
- Major changes in eating habits
- Sex-drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostility, or violence
- Suicidal thoughts or actions

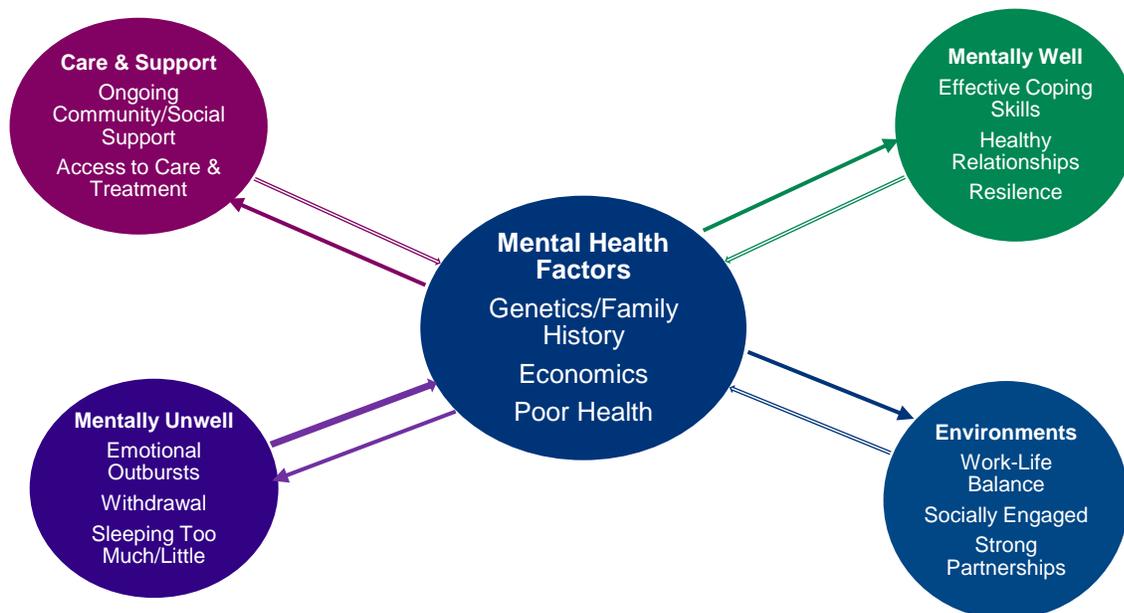
Experiencing emotions such as sadness or nervousness is normal. However, when these feelings or changes in mood begin to disrupt a person's daily life or their ability to work, socialize, or care for themselves and others, seeking professional help in conjunction with spiritual support may be necessary.^{6,8}

Types of mental illness and serious mental illness include^{4,8}:

- Anxiety Disorders
- Depression
- Addiction and Substance Abuse
- Bipolar Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Schizophrenia

Faith leaders can serve as a frontline support system for people dealing with mental illness, specifically Black adults in the United States.² One study showed that over 90% of Black adults use religious coping, such as attending church and praying, to deal with mental health issues.^{9,10} As the graphic below illustrates, mental health exists on a continuum. Understanding this concept is critical to provide effective and culturally tailored support to persons living with mental illness and their loved ones.

Mental health continuum^{8,11}:



BLACK AMERICANS AND MENTAL HEALTH

BY THE NUMBERS

The intersection of mental health, race, and ethnicity is important to understand. Black Americans account for roughly 13% of the US population.^{12,13} While the prevalence of mental illness is similar to that found in other groups, there are glaring disparities in diagnosis, access to care, utilization of services, and overall health among Black communities.^{2,5,12,14} These inequities have resulted in the following challenges among Black adults in the United States regarding mental health:

- Between 2008 and 2018, the rate of serious thoughts of suicide increased from 6% (277,000) to 9.5% (439,000) in Black adults aged 18 to 25 years old¹⁵
- ~17.3% (~5.3 million) of Black adults reported having a mental illness, and ~4.7% (~1.4 million) of Black adults reported living with a serious mental illness in 2020^{5,13,16}
- Serious mental illness increased among Black adults between 2008 and 2018¹⁵
- Although Black Americans have lower rates of major depressive episodes than the overall US population, rates increased from 6.1% to 9.4% in young Black adults aged 18-25 and from 5.7% to 6.3% in Black adults aged 26-49 between 2015 and 2018¹⁵

[Link to “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” PDF from Resource Kit]

Other Considerations

The impact of mental illness on Black families and communities is related to complex factors such as socioeconomic status, overall health status, and other social and cultural factors.^{12,17} It is important for faith leaders to understand these contributing factors and the role they play in the disparities experienced among Black adults in the US.

- Black communities are not monolithic and are culturally diverse.² The African diaspora represented in America includes immigrants from African nations, the Caribbean, Central America, and other countries^{2,18}
- About 19.5% of Black Americans live below the poverty level compared to about 8.2% of non-Hispanic whites¹⁹
- Approximately 30% of Black American households are headed by a woman²⁰
- Approximately 14% of Black adults are not covered by health insurance, compared to about 9% of non-Hispanic whites.²¹ In 2019, roughly 58% of Black adults in comparison to 75% of non-Hispanic white adults used private health insurance²⁰

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

BARRIERS TO CARE, TREATMENT, AND SERVICES

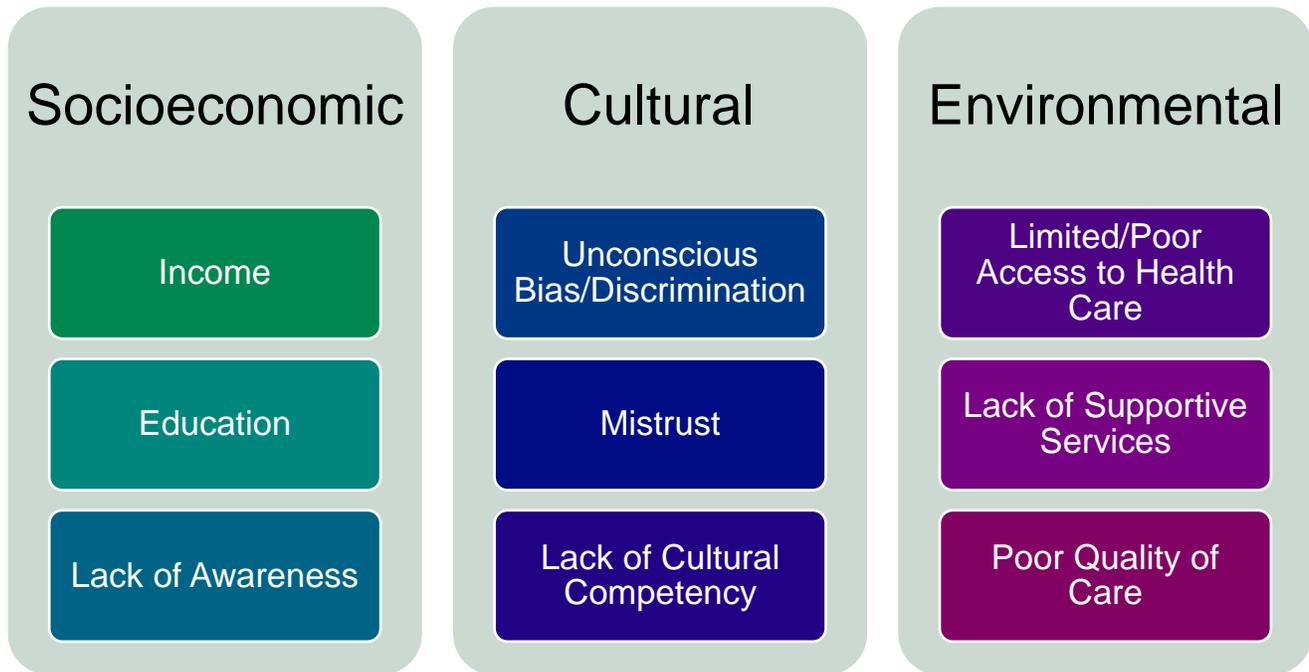
While there have been improvements in efforts made to address the growing challenges related to mental health and illness among Black communities, there remain significant barriers to access and utilization of care, treatment, and other supportive services aimed at early and proper diagnosis as well as better management of symptoms related to mental illness.¹⁴

Disparities persist in mental health diagnosis, access to culturally appropriate care, and care settings, and these factors, combined with social determinants of health, which include the conditions of the environment where people live, learn, and work, may contribute to systemic healthcare inequities.¹²

Research has shown there are many reasons Black Americans often do not use mental health services, including facing prejudice and discrimination, cost and insurance, and structural barriers, like lack of transportation or lack of information on how to access services, implicated by racism.^{22,23}

In fact, while 13% of the US population identifies as Black, only 2% of psychiatrists identify as Black.¹⁷ Outcomes may be improved when mental health professionals understand and incorporate cultural needs and differences into a person's care plan.²⁴

The graphic below highlights barriers that exist across the policies, systems, and environments that play a role in healthcare and mental health outcomes.¹²



As trusted voices in the Black community, faith leaders should also understand the role of culture in mental health, particularly for minority populations. Minorities in the United States are less likely to get mental health treatment or will wait until symptoms are severe before looking.² Further, racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to have access to culturally appropriate care and more likely to receive poorer quality care when treated.²

Given the influential role faith plays among Black adults, faith leaders can serve as a bridge between persons living with mental illness, their families, and communities at large.

Several ways that culture can impact mental health include but are not limited to:

Cultural stigma in Black Americans—There is significant perceived stigma around mental illness within the Black community.^{2,9,12} As a result, mental health challenges may be seen as a weakness or something to hide.⁹ Stigma can make it difficult for those struggling to seek help or open up about their issues.^{2,9}

Recognizing & understanding symptoms—Cultural attitudes and mindsets like the “strong Black woman” or “real men don’t cry” may be pervasive among Black Americans. Cultural attitudes can influence whether or not an individual is aware of the signs and symptoms of a mental illness and how they describe these symptoms.²

Community relationships and support—Black Americans share common ethnic traits that are centered around communal and ancestral beliefs and customs.²⁴ When stigma and negative attitudes about mental illness and mental health exist, they may influence how much support someone receives.² This may lead to increased feelings of embarrassment, isolation, and sadness among persons living with mental illness.²

[Link to “Be Empowered to Work Towards Mental Wellness” PDF from Resource Kit]

ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH

MIND, BODY, SOUL CONNECTIONS

Higher levels of religious belief and practice may affect health outcomes.^{2,4} Specifically, some research suggests that our faith and spiritual beliefs may help with coping with depression, substance use disorder, and suicidal behavior.^{2,25} Religion and faith may also support overall better life satisfaction and subjective well-being.^{2,4}

For persons living with mental illness, religious beliefs and routine engagement can be important in the recovery process.^{2,4} Literature suggests that both public and private forms of religious expression may benefit overall self-perception and self-esteem.^{2,24} Religious expression may take many different forms, such as weekly visits to a place of worship or daily morning prayer and meditation. For the Black community and faith leaders, this is important given reports from the Pew Research Center showing that when compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States, Black Americans are more likely to attend church or other religious services regularly and have reported that prayer is used to help deal with illnesses.^{1,10}

The Community Health Equity Alliance has developed an educational, solution-oriented resource kit to help address disparities in mental illness care for Black adults. As a trusted source of information and support, faith leaders play a crucial role in providing guidance to congregation members.

This guide, along with the educational resource kit, can be used to help increase mental health awareness, destigmatize mental illness, and provide information on how to navigate the mental health system.

WHAT CHURCHES/PLACES OF WORSHIP CAN DO

Faith Leaders

Mental health conditions are treatable, and improvement through symptom management can be achieved.^{4,6,8} Hearing from faith leaders about the various resources and treatments available to them and their loved ones may help make it easier for Black adults to discuss mental health and seek treatment. [Link to “How to Navigate the Mental Health Care System” PDF from Resource Kit]

Best practices typically consist of a combination of therapy and medication.

It is important to help Black adults living with a mental health condition get connected to a mental healthcare professional. These professionals can help with assessing someone’s symptoms and making a diagnosis, as well as providing continued support, information, resources, and services throughout the treatment journey. There are different types of mental health professionals that offer different types of support. Consider the below when working with congregation members experiencing mental health conditions to help connect them to care.

| Types of Mental Health Professionals^{4,26} | |
|--|---|
| Psychologists | Trained to diagnose a mental health condition and provide therapy. |
| Psychiatrists | Trained medical doctors to diagnose a mental health condition, prescribe and monitor medications and provide therapy. |
| Psychiatric or Mental Health Nurse Practitioners | Trained to diagnose a mental health condition and provide therapy. In some states, they are qualified to prescribe and monitor medications. |
| Counselors, Clinicians, Therapists | Trained to evaluate a person's mental health and use therapeutic techniques. |
| Clinical Social Workers | Trained to evaluate a person's mental health and use therapeutic techniques; also trained in case management and advocacy services. |
| Psychiatric Pharmacists | Trained as advanced-practice pharmacists who specialize in mental health care to prescribe and recommend medications, if allowed in state/practice setting. |

A strong support team can help along the journey. It can include members of the faith community and its leaders, who can help play a major role in an individual's coping, recovery, and well-being. Treatment plans include a variety of support services, depending on the person's need.

| Types of Treatment Plan Options⁴ | |
|--|---|
| Medication | Medical treatments treat the mental illness by influencing the brain chemicals that can help regulate symptoms |
| Psychosocial Treatments | Psychosocial treatments include different types of talk therapy and education. These sessions are led by trained therapists to help provide new ways of thinking and behaving and to solve problems that will improve quality of life for individuals with mental illness |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Peer Support | Peer-support programs teach skills and offer support from people who use their experience with mental illness to help others with a mental health condition, so they can lead meaningful lives in the community. These can include self-help and support groups and social trainings |
| Holistic Health Approaches | Holistic health approaches seek to address emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual needs, looking at the whole person. In combination with medication, psychosocial treatments, and peer support, these can include activities that help connect a person's mind and body, such as exercise, yoga, meditation, and maintaining a healthy diet to help promote overall health and wellness |

As a faith leader, it is important to remind your congregation that many people living with mental illness are often able to return to full functioning at work, home, and church, and to guide those living with a mental illness towards the resources and information that can help them find care. Mental health care and treatment are based on the individual and should be developed collaboratively with a mental health clinician and family members if the individual desires.

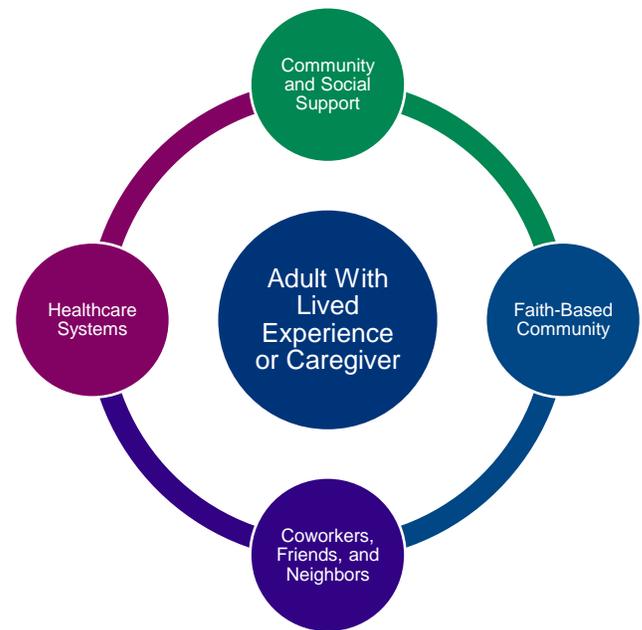
Faith Community

In moments of dealing with loved ones who are living with mental illnesses, it is key to stand firm on the foundation of your faith during these challenging times. Mental illness not only affects the individual, but also affects the family and community as well.

A good support system with family members, friends, community, and faith-based organizations, coupled with strategic planning, can make all the difference in alleviating the stress of caring for a loved one with mental illness.⁴ A good support system not only provide access to help and services beneficial to the person with mental illness but is key to providing the assistance families and caregivers need. Far too often caregivers struggle when faced with the many challenges they encounter while providing care for a loved one struggling with a mental illness.

The faith community can be a source of strength and support for the individual living with mental illness, along with caregivers and family.

Here are some key actions and strategies for congregations to take to improve and support mental health and well-being for those living with mental illnesses, in addition to being a spiritual source of comfort:



Create inclusive and welcoming environments

- Create a safe environment within the place of worship by promoting an atmosphere of openness and inclusiveness
- Host educational workshops
- Provide opportunities to connect before or after the liturgy to provide a connection to familiar times and places
- Provide and share mental health resources, such as information from trusted sources, like advocacy organizations or healthcare professionals, on how to seek and maintain care

Provide support to persons living with mental illness and their families

- Ask family members how they are and how their loved one is doing on an ongoing basis
- Offer to assist the family to get the person referred or connected with services like local support groups, outpatient counseling, transportation, job placement, or financial assistance
- Provide meals and run errands
- Be a willing listener and avoid passing judgement or stigmatizing behaviors
- Provide ongoing prayer support for the person with mental illness and their family members

[Link to “Community Inclusion” PDF within Resource Kit]

PASTORAL RESOURCES: SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES AND LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Providing support and care for persons with mental illness and their families can be an overwhelming challenge. Please find strength, comfort, and inspiration in these uplifting Bible verses.

- “Be strong and courageous and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.” —1 Chronicles 28:20
- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.” —Proverbs 3:5–6
- “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” —Psalm 51:10–12
- “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” —1 Thessalonians 5:9–11
- “I lift my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” —Psalm 121:1–2
- “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” —Psalm 4:8
- “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” —Isaiah 40:29–31
- “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.” —1 Timothy 1:12
- “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” —Luke 6:38
- “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” —Matthew. 11:28–30
- “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” —1 Peter 5:7
- “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” —1 Samuel 16:7
- “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” —Romans 8:18
- “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.” —Matthew 25:40
- “The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” —Lamentations 3:25–26
- “Do not cast me off in time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.” - Psalm 71:9

- “Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.” —Psalm 71:17–18
- “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute, speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” —Proverbs 31:8–9
- “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.” - Psalm 19:14

Prayers

Prayer for Persons Living With Mental Illness

Loving God, Healer and Comforter,

We pray for those who may be suffering from mental illness. In their times of struggle and depression, be with them. Bless their families that surround them with love and patience. Give them peace, security and safety as within their dwelling places. Even in moments of uncertainty, we ask for your divine guidance and strength. Be the balm in Gilead to heal all of their infirmities.

In Your name we pray,

Amen.

Prayer for Families and Caregivers of People with Mental Illness

Lord, we pray today for the selfless people who care for men and women living with mental health conditions. You know how difficult the work is, how limited the resources are, and how heavy the burden is. We ask You to give them strength in their weakest and most vulnerable moments.

Continue to give them assurance that You are wrapping your loving arms around them as they care for those individuals that they have loved for so long who may not be able to reciprocate the same love. Fill their hearts with your goodness and comfort, and their souls with love. Help them find ways to rest and take care of themselves. Give them peace in times of doubt, calm every fear and dry their eyes when tears begin to fall.

Remind them that You are the ultimate Father who does all things well.

In Jesus Name,

Amen

Responsive Readings

Opening Litany: Psalm 130

Healing God, we come together in our brokenness,
to call to you in your mercy, to make us whole again.

Wholeness-giving God, listen to our prayers, we pray.

Restoring God, we gather to worship you, even as
we hopefully seek to be renewed and restored again.

God, our Quiet-Centre, listen to our prayers this day.

Foundational God, we come to praise and thank you!

In the depths of your Holy Being we find peace and rest.

God—our Beginning and our End, we hope always in you. Amen.

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Healing for the World

O God of all creation, you have fearfully and wonderfully fashioned us and breathed your life into us;
from the crown of our heads to the soles of our feet, Lord, Reign.

Reign in us, Precious Savior, Reign.

As the Great Physician who healed the woman at the well, you are the same Wonder who finds us in the
uttermost parts of the world to heal us—mind, spirit, and body.

Awesome Healer, rescue and deliver, even now.

As the Master Potter and Crafter who takes broken things and mends them back together again, melt us
and mold us into the restored children, women, and men that you have destined us to be. Providing
Shepherd who charts the path ahead of us, who both precedes and follows us, place your hand of
blessing on our heads and shepherd our souls. We find refuge and rest in your care.

**We bless your Holy Name and we praise you for being the God who heals not only our bodies but
also our souls.**

Responsive Prayer for Healing and Wholeness

by Edward Fudge

Leader: Let us name before God those for whom we offer our prayers.

People: [Spontaneously name those for whom you now wish to intercede in prayer.]

Leader: God, Our Healer, your will for all people is health and salvation. We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

People: Son of God, you came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

Leader: Holy Spirit, you make our bodies the temple of your presence. We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured, or disabled, that they may be made whole. Hear us, O Lord of life.

Leader: Grant to all who seek your guidance, and to all who are lonely, anxious, or despondent, companionship, knowledge of your will, and an awareness of your presence. Hear us, O Lord of life.

People: Mend broken relationships and restore those in emotional distress to soundness of mind and serenity of spirit. Hear us, O Lord of life.

Leader: Bless physicians, nurses, and all others who minister to the suffering, granting them wisdom and skill, sympathy, and patience. Hear us, O Lord of life.

People: Give to the dying peace and a holy death and uphold by the grace and consolation of your Holy Spirit those who are bereaved. Hear us, O Lord of life.

Leader: Restore to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin: in our lives, in our nation, and in the world. Hear us, O Lord of life.

People: You are the Lord who does wonders. You have declared your power among the peoples.

Leader: With you, O Lord, is the well of life, and in your light, we see light.

People: Hear us, O Lord of life. Heal us and make us whole.

Leader: Almighty God, giver of life and health: send your blessing on all who are sick, and on all who minister to them, that all weakness may be vanquished by the triumph of the risen Christ, who lives and reigns forever and ever.

All: Savior of the world, by your cross and precious blood you have redeemed us. Save us and help us, we humbly pray, Amen.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES

Today, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter provide congregations with a powerful tool to disseminate health messages and connect with the community. Congregations and others from the community can use social media to do the following:

- Share mental health facts and information about available resources to members of your church and the community
- Maximize existing networks to facilitate information and resource sharing to support persons living with serious mental illness and their loved ones
- Connect and engage with other congregations, faith-based organizations, and community partners to raise awareness about mental health among African Americans and the importance of culturally tailored care, treatment, and supportive services
- Empower people to stand up to stigma about mental illness and to create safe spaces for those impacted by mental health challenges to seek information, care, and support

The Balm In Gilead, under the Community Health Equity Alliance, a collaboration with Janssen Neuroscience, The Balm In Gilead, Mental Health America of Central Carolinas, i2i Center for Integrative Health, and Empower East, has created the following tools to support the communications and social media activities of congregations participating in Mental Health Inequity Sundays:

- ✓ Sample Press Releases (for print and radio outlets)
- ✓ Sample Social Media Post (including hashtags)

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Print Media Outlets

{Month, Day, Year}

CONTACT

{Contact Name}

{Organization Name}

{Contact Telephone}

{Insert Your Church/Organization Name} Holds Mental Health Event to Raise Awareness Among Black Adults in the United States About Mental Illness

{City, State} — **{Your Church Name}** will host **Name of Event** on **Date** at **{Location: Street Address, City, State}** to bring attention to the tremendous burden and impacts mental illness is having on the Black/African American community and to utilize the power and influence of the Black/African American pulpit. The goal is to bring awareness and to distribute information about mental illness, encourage participation in care and other supportive services, eliminate stigmas, and support persons living with mental illness and their families.

Serious mental illness affects the entire family and not just the person with the mental health condition. This is why **{Insert Your Church's Name here}** family is helping to raise awareness about signs and symptoms, the importance of proper diagnosis, and available resources for the management of mental illness. Please join us.

{Your Church Name} is inviting the surrounding community to attend our free mental health awareness event. We will be **{INCLUDE DETAILS OF EVENT or how your church will be participating}**. The statistics support the **{Insert Your Church Name}**'s concern. Approximately 17% of Black adults reported having a mental illness in the past year, affecting an estimated 5.3 million Black adults in the United States.^{5,13,20} Black Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia or to be less diagnosed with affective disorders due to a lack of awareness, and a lack of access to appropriate medical care.²⁴

QUOTE: “There is no better time and no better place for our community to learn about mental illness and its impacts on our communities than in the church,” according to {Insert Your Faith-leader’s name and/or Balm in Gilead representative}.

The Community Health Equity Alliance is brought to the community by Janssen Neuroscience, The Balm In Gilead, Inc., based in Richmond, VA, Mental Health American of Central Carolinas, Empower East, and i2i Center for Integrative Health. Through Breaking the Chains of Mental Health Inequity, The Balm In Gilead develops educational and training programs specifically designed to meet the unique needs of African American congregations that strive to become community centers for health education and disease prevention. The Balm In Gilead is known for its insightful understanding of religious cultures and values and extraordinary ability to build strong, trusted partnerships with faith communities. The Balm In Gilead has been entrusted to build the capacity of national faith structures to utilize their existing relationships to deliver comprehensive health services. To get your community or church organization involved, sign up at www.balmingilead.org for more information.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Radio/TV Media Outlets
PSA, FIFTEEN (15) SECONDS**

{Date the announcement can first be made} Through {Date it should last be made}

CONTACT:

{Contact Name}
{Organization Name}
{Contact Telephone}

SUBJECT: {Insert Your Church Name} Holds Mental Health Educational Event to Increase Awareness of Mental Health Challenges Among Black Americans

{Insert Your Church Name} will host its **Name of Event** on **Date** to bring awareness of mental illness to the Black/African American community. Wear your favorite green outfit or ribbon to shine a light on the tremendous burden and effects of mental illness on the Black community. Our event will provide resources and information for individuals dealing with mental illness and their families. For more information, call **{insert your church name, telephone number}**. Mental matters!

SOCIAL MEDIA POST AND HASHTAGS



Use the hashtags #faithandmentalhealth and #thebalmingilead so we can track your social media promotion. We encourage you to customize your social media messaging as much as possible to bring more awareness to your specific event.

[Sample Facebook posts](#)

[Sample Tweets](#)

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