**Mental Health Advocate Initiative: Culture of Wellness Toward Better Mental Health**

*Wellness happens wherever belonging, purpose, and hope are offered. The Church is perfectly designed to foster wellness!*

**What Each “Culture of Wellness Component” Provides:**

**Word and Sacrament+Pastoral Care:** God gives us His Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and The Lord’s Supper to nourish our whole person health: body, mind, and spirit. The pastor distributes these gifts in the Divine Service/worship service. God’s gifts form and sustain identity in Christ, the foundation of resiliency. The pastor provides ongoing spiritual care for individuals experiencing a mental health challenge and their families. The pastor, along with the Mental Health Advocate, connect the individual and the family with additional professionals, organizations, and resources which aid in whole person care.

**Professional Resources:** The pastor refers people with mental health concerns to their physician, a counselor, therapist, or other trained professional(s) as needed. The pastor continues spiritual care throughout the individual’s wellness journey.

**Peers:** Mental Health Advocates, mental health ministry team members, Stephen Ministry leaders, others with similar lived experience, and small group leaders also walk alongside the individual with mental health concerns to provide community, encouragement, support, and hope. They also provide care for the individual’s family as needed.

**Community:** Groups/missions/activities within the church help provide a sense of belonging and purpose.

**Self-Care:** Good whole person self-care practices and coping skills foster resiliency and optimal mental and emotional well-being.

**Suggestions for Each “Culture of Wellness Component:”**

**Word and Sacrament+Pastoral Care:** Encourage regular worship and Bible study attendance of all church members, especially those with mental health concerns. You may need to provide transportation and sit with the individual during the service or Bible study class. Also encourage individuals to speak with their pastor when they feel as if their mental health is struggling. Statistics show that 25% of people with a mental health concern go to their pastor first before consulting with a medical professional or counselor because they have a trusted relationship with the pastor.

**Professional Resources:** Encourage people struggling with mental health concerns to get a physical check up with their physician because physical illnesses can often be the cause of some mental health issues. Your pastor can refer people struggling with their mental health to a mental health professional as needed.

**Peers:** Peers include the Mental Health Advocate(s), mental health ministry team members, others with similar lived experience, small group leaders, Stephen Ministers, etc. If your church has Stephen Ministry, talk to your pastor about assigning the person you’re concerned about with a Stephen Minister. It may also be helpful to connect the person you’re concerned about with someone in your church with similar lived experience (with their permission in advance) for additional support and encouragement. Equip your congregation with trainings to learn best practices for how to walk alongside someone who is struggling with his/her mental health, such as: Companionship training, The Sanctuary Course, Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aid, QPR/ASIST/C-SSRS suicide prevention training, Spiritual First Aid, etc. Also consider using the following curricula in small groups in your church to foster mental wellness: Mental Health Grace Alliance Grace Groups, The Sanctuary Course, Run Hard Rest Well’s *Vantage Point,* etc.

**Community:**

Would the person you’re concerned about benefit from being a part of a group that meets at your church, such as a grief support group, addiction recovery support group, men’s/women’s Bible study group, or other type of group? Encourage the person you’re concerned about to join a group where their gifts/talents can be used to build up the Church and provide a sense of purpose and belonging (musical, artistic, cooking, sewing, mechanical, computer, organizational skills, etc.) Encourage the person you’re concerned about to help someone else as he/she is able. If your congregation does not have a group that meets the individual’s needs, please refer to the “List of The Lutheran Foundation’s Congregations by County, Highlighting Additional Ministries” (available on the Mental Health Advocate Private Resource Page) to see if you can help connect them with a group in another local Lutheran church.

**Self-Care:** Encourage personal devotion time, 7-9 hours of sleep each night, good hydration, exercise, hobbies, etc. for self-care. Individuals living with mental health concerns can also benefit from learning strategies and coping skills for resilience by individually going through a Mental Health Grace Alliance Grace Group book, such as *Thrive* or *Living Grace,* or Run Hard Rest Well’s book *Vantage Point*.

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