

Mental Illness—in Our Church?

Mental disorders (depression, bipolar disorder, dementia, and others) are the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada for people 15–44, but a lack of understanding leads us to fear mental illness.



The apostle Paul says of the body of Christ, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Our brothers and sisters in Christ who live with mental illnesses, as well as their families, need to know the gracious love of Jesus Christ that they can find uniquely in the healing presence of fellow Christians.

You can be that healing presence. Talking openly and lovingly during worship and in other settings can reduce the fear and stigma of mental illnesses. RCA Disability Concerns offers a variety of resources to assist churches at www.rca.org/disability.

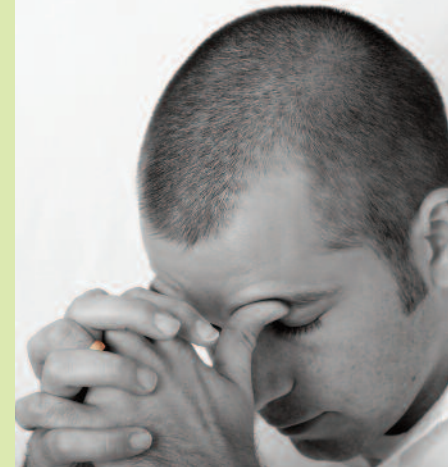


RCA Disability Concerns
Accessible, Inclusive, Missional Churches
Engaging People with Disabilities
www.rca.org/disability 616-541-0855



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True or False?

- ___ 1. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for those ages 15–24.
- ___ 2. The unemployment rate among people with a serious mental illness is 90 percent.
- ___ 3. Psychotic disorders and substance abuse are usually unrelated problems.
- ___ 4. There are no positive aspects to mental illness.
- ___ 5. The physical, mental, and sexual abuse of women make them more vulnerable to depression.
- ___ 6. People living in rural settings tend to have fewer serious mental health problems than those who live in urban areas.
- ___ 7. Catholics are more likely to commit suicide than Protestants.
- ___ 8. People with a mental illness and other disabilities are much more often victims of violence than perpetrators.

The Stigma of Mental Illness

Mental illness troubles our relationships because it can affect the way we process information, relate to others, and choose actions. Consequently, mental illnesses often are feared in ways that other disabilities are not. **Stigma** is the word we use to describe expressions of this fear.

Where there is stigma:

- People refuse to talk about what they feel because they fear what their friends will think or say.
- People hesitate to seek treatment because they fear what will appear on their record.
- People hesitate to admit to a hospital stay because they fear others' reactions.
- Congregations hesitate to bring casseroles to someone following a hospital stay because they are uncertain what to do.

True-False answers: 1. True. 2. True. 3. False; about half of those with a psychotic disorder also have a substance abuse problem, often because they try to self-medicate. 4. False; some theologians believe there is a link between mental illness and religious experience; mental illness may have contributed to Emily Dickinson's poetic creativity during the years she never left home; writer William Styron masterfully described depression so that the wider population might understand it. 5. True. 6. False; those who live in rural areas tend to wait until the problems are more serious, likely because of stigma, a long tradition of self-sufficiency, and inadequate access to mental health care; given the RCA's concentration of churches in rural areas, the scarcity of resources should be of particular concern to all in the RCA. 7. False. 8. True.

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