

September 2018

*“Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.” – Psalm 103:2-3*

Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. My beloved friends and family, welcome to the month of September. I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to the warm days and cooler nights as we inch our way toward Autumn and the wonderful gifts that the end of summer provides. I also look forward to football beginning again and the rivalries between our school districts and the MN and WI teams getting back into full swing. I also look forward to our congregations returning to their Christian Education and Confirmation schedules back as school begins once again.

This month, I want to also bring to your attention something that we rarely speak of because there is still a great stigma that is attached to it: Mental Illness. Mental illness can take many forms and shapes and is often swept under the rug or not even mentioned at all. As a matter of fact, in the last months, I have been a part of many conversations regarding depression, anxiety issues, and different kinds of illness that cross the spectrum that people hide. I have even talked with some essentially bringing them off of the edge from taking their own lives because they feel that humanity would be better without them, and that they are out of choices because their pain is so strong and hurts too much.

And with school beginning again, that means that some return to a place that not hurts them physically because of bullying and feeling out of place, but because some cannot take the pressures of so much being put on their plate. Those in the agricultural businesses also suffer from higher rates of mental illness, yet it is often hidden very well, and the elderly who have lost spouses or are in a place where a debilitating or terminal disease provides options for taking their own lives before the pain really begins to take its toll.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, or NAMI, the numbers are staggering on how depression has crept into our modern culture, yet often goes unnoticed and even untreated. However, the consequences of not recognizing or treating mental illness increases our chances of having chronic medical conditions. The additional stresses associated with these types of illnesses put added negative pressure on the body, including the circulatory and nervous systems. And here is an amazing statistic: On average, adults living with serious mental illnesses that go untreated face an increase of dying 25 years earlier than those who go untreated. That is an amazing statistic! Unfortunately, a great percentage of those who die early result in taking their own lives as a way of relieving the stress, feeling out of place, or not even feeling present at all. This is not a coward's way out – suicide is often a result of a sickness.

Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the United States and the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for youth from the ages of 10 to 14. It is also the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15-24. This is real, and this is around us in our families and our communities...and the numbers are astounding. And each day, between 18-22 veterans take their own lives as a way out...and this is absolutely unacceptable.

September is National Suicide month. I would like to invite you all, especially those who have children in the GFW schools, to attend the “Just One: Just One Life Matters” at BLHS high school in Hector on September 09, 2018 at 6:30 pm. Your local church leaders and school officials have been working very hard on preparing and planning for this important event. The reality of mental health, depression, and suicidal thoughts are one of those things that are often overlooked and rarely spoken about. Shame and brokenness arise from these conversations, rather than lifting up those beloved children of God who are sick and need our help and love. Let us break this culture of silence and help those with God’s grace who need help for themselves.

If you would like to know more about mental illnesses and the healing and the therapeutic options that may be available to you, please contact me and we can discuss this even further. And I promise, this will stay between you and I. If you know someone who is considering harming themselves, please call 911 immediately, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-TALK (8255). You can also text “MN” to 741741.

May the Lord continue to bless you, and keep you; the Lord’s face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. And the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you everlasting peace. I look forwards to seeing you in worship my friends.

In His name,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish

National Alliance on Mental Health. (2018). <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org>: <https://www.nami.org>