

## **MISSION:**

Caring Communities are faith communities that covenant to enable an understanding of mental illness and to foster ministry to and with persons with mental illness and their families.

## **Process:**

Caring Communities are churches (1) that have undertaken an education program within the congregation on the topic of mental illness and (2) whose leadership have committed to a covenant statement for the church to be identified as a Caring Community that welcomes persons with mental illness and their families, and (3) that participate in ongoing welcome, support and advocacy, in their church and the community.

### **How to Become a Caring Community: Education**

- Pray for knowledge and insight about mental illness, those who suffer from a mental illness and their families.
- Find out what your denomination is doing in the area of mental health and what resources are offered for education through classes and small groups. Over 25 denominations and inter-faith groups have made statements related to mental health and mental illness.
- Ask your pastor to include mental illness in sermons and worship liturgy where appropriate.
- Tie in to Mental Health Month in May and to Mental Illness Awareness Week in October.
- Educate yourself on what severe mental illness is – and ISN'T.
- Educate about community resources.
- Visit an existing treatment facility – hospital, halfway house, or a group home.
- Provide resources on mental illness.
- Schedule special events with speakers.
- Invite consumers (persons with a mental illness) to share their story.
- Ask for a speaker from the speaker's bureau from mental illness organizations

to talk with your church and invite persons from the community.

- Form one or more special classes to study serious mental illness and ways congregations can be supportive.
- Sponsor education programs through organizations such as National Alliance for the Mentally Ill's "Family to Family" program or the "In Our Own Voice" program.
- Educate and train the faith community about the mental illness community and their accompanying problems to promote the building of relationships between the two communities. This process will encompass the use of training workshops and the sharing of life stories by persons with a mental illness.

### **How to Become a Caring Community: Covenant**

- Gain support for a mental illness ministry from the clergy and the church's governing body.
- Pray that the covenant will be a three-way covenant between the congregation, those with mental illness, and God.
- Ask your governing body what your church is doing to make all persons with disabilities, including persons with mental illness, feel welcome and a part of congregational life.
- Request that your church commit to advertising the congregation as a Caring Community.
- Establish a task force for the purpose of training and educating the faith community about mental illness and the development of a mental illness ministry.
- Request Church Council or appropriate committees or boards to adopt a statement endorsing a program of education and outreach to welcome persons with a serious mental illness and their families into the life of the congregation.

### **How to Become a Caring Community:**

#### **Welcome**

- Show video "Creating Caring Communities," a project of Mental Health Ministries as a model for how churches can begin to address the stigma and shame associated with mental illness. ([www.MentalHealthMinistries.net](http://www.MentalHealthMinistries.net) or [sgschroed@cox.net](mailto:sgschroed@cox.net))
- Provide training for ushers and greeters to include specific means of being welcoming and supportive.
- Plan worship services on mental health issues.
- Post specific words of welcome visible from outside the church building.
- Seek newspaper publicity identifying your church as welcoming to persons with a mental illness.

### **How to Become a Caring Community:**

#### **Support**

- Do more than be friendly. BE a FRIEND to those who have no friends, as severe mental illness tends to isolate people. Include them in your outings, invite them to a ballgame, out to eat after church, or accompany them to church activities.
- Volunteer your help in programs serving persons who have a mental illness.
- Pray for persons who are mentally ill, for those who work to help them—both their families and professionals—and for a better understanding in your church of the concerns of people with mental illness.
- Train lay persons to be a caring presence and provide emotional support to those struggling with a mental illness.
- Invite support groups such as the local Mental Health Association, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) or the National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association (DBSA) to meet in your church.

## How to Become a Caring Community:

### Advocacy

- Pray that the hearts of those who do not support mental illness programs will be softened.
- Support funding for research into severe mental illness.
- Work for parity in health insurance for physical and mental illnesses.
- Contact the governor and your state representatives to let them know you care about services for persons who are mentally ill.
- Join an advocacy group to better support the needs of mentally ill persons even if you don't have an ill family member. Be alert to pending legislation regarding the disabled and mentally ill.
- Be a STIGMA BUSTER. Let your voice be heard when media and groups stigmatize mental illness.

### Resources

American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
(703) 385-6967  
[www.aapc.org](http://www.aapc.org)

Congregational Resources  
[www.congregationalresources.org/mentalhealth.asp](http://www.congregationalresources.org/mentalhealth.asp)

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)  
[www.DBSAAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org)

FaithNet NAMI  
[www.FaithNetNAMI.org](http://www.FaithNetNAMI.org)

Mental Health Ministries  
[www.MentalHealthMinistries.net](http://www.MentalHealthMinistries.net)

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

Oasis (Organization for Attempters and Survivors of Suicide)  
[www.Oasis.org](http://www.Oasis.org)

Pathways to Promise  
[www.Pathways2Promise.org](http://www.Pathways2Promise.org)

VICOMIM (Virginia Interfaith Committee on Mental Illness Ministries)  
[www.vaumc.org/gm/micom.htm](http://www.vaumc.org/gm/micom.htm)

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### BOOKS BY REV. GREGG-SCHROEDER

*In the Shadow of God's Wings:  
Grace in the Midst of Depression* (\$10)  
*In the Shadow of God's Wings:  
Group Study Guide* (\$7)  
The Upper Room - (800) 972-0433

In taking us on her personal journey into depression, Gregg-Schroeder encourages a new understanding of the spiritual gifts that can come from depression. The Group Study Guide is written to accompany Gregg-Schroeder's book and provides small-group leaders with the material needed to facilitate a four-session study.

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Resources available through Mental Health Ministries, [www.MentalHealthMinistries.net](http://www.MentalHealthMinistries.net)

#### Video Resources:

"Creating Caring Congregations"  
"Understanding Depression"  
"Teenage Depression and Suicide"  
"Overcoming Stigma, Finding Hope"  
"Gifts of the Shadow"  
"Addiction and Depression"  
"Eating Disorders"  
"Anxiety: Overcoming Fear"  
"Alzheimer's: Care and Support"  
"Mental Illness and Families of Faith"

#### DVD Resource:

*Mental Health Mission Moments* is an ecumenical resource to address mental health issues using 2-3 minute DVD clips. A Resource Guide is included with sermon starters, liturgies and other resource material.

# Creating Caring Congregations



## Mental Health Ministries

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[www.MentalHealthMinistries.net](http://www.MentalHealthMinistries.net)