

## **Report to the Synod Council of the Mental Health Task Force**

Meetings – October 1, October 29, November 18, December 10

The Mental Health Task Force has as its point persons Rev. Michael Jannett and Mr. Adam Renner. We began meeting in October for project discernment and identifying potential leaders to join the effort. We crafted an invitation to send out to the deans and announced the team's formation at Convocation. Several rostered clergy and lay members have stepped forward so far, and we hope to keep expanding the team as our work progresses.

Team participants currently include:

- Rev. Michael Jannett (Atlanta GA), Assistant to the Bishop
- Mr. Adam Renner (Atlanta GA), in candidacy, Counselor-in-training, Suicide Prevention Ministry
- Mr. Jerry Weyrauch (Atlanta GA), Suicide Prevention Ministry
- Ms. Susan Weyrauch (Atlanta GA), Licensed Professional Counselor, Suicide Prevention Ministry
- Rev. Dr. Brian Hooper (Nashville TN), Licensed Psychotherapist
- Ms. Jeannie Ingram (Nashville TN), Licensed Professional Counselor, Coach, and Consultant
- Rev. Esther Nguomo (Nashville TN), Kiswahili Lutheran Mission
- Rev. Morgan Gordy (I think)???
- Rev. Michelle Kuhlman (Carrollton GA), Grace Lutheran Church
- Rev. Dena Lane (Austell GA), Lutheran Church of the Nativity
- Ms. Gabby Lewis (Murfreesboro TN), Advent Lutheran Church
- Ms. Angela Jetty (Atlanta GA), in candidacy, Psychology major at Georgia State University

Based on Resolution 2019-2A submitted by SESLYO and adopted by the Synod Assembly, we began by envisioning our first project and what it would look like to “gather resources in each of the four states of our synod to assist pastors and lay members in referring those in need of mental health treatment” and display them on the synod websites “with links to various state and governmental sites, as well as nationally recognized mental health associations.” At first, we thought it pertinent to create a referral directory of resources that would include various therapists in private practice, treatment centers, support groups, and so on. The team decided that this was too large of a scope, that it was unsustainable, and that it would only replicate existing directories such as Psychology Today. A new project scope was adopted to create a Wikipedia-style site about various mental health topics, which would not only include links to outside resources but would provide guidance on how to navigate those resources and the mental health sphere. Psychoeducation is thus a key objective so that people who look to our website can learn how to get the most out of the resources provided. The Wiki site may also include recommendations for specific therapists, treatment centers, etc., but that will be a bonus, and our main focus will be on equipping people to identify and evaluate treatment options for themselves.

Initial topics on the Wiki site will include:

- How to use Psychology Today to find a therapist or treatment center
- Different types of therapists, credentials, and licensures (e.g., psychologist vs. psychiatrist vs. counselor, etc.)
- Types of therapy
- How to interview your Therapist to see if they are a fit for you
- Substance Abuse and Addiction
- Suicide
- Support for family survivors of suicide
- Crisis intervention
- Trauma and PTSD
- LGBTQ identity and issues in counseling
- Pastoral counseling
- Multicultural issues in counseling
- Resources for Immigrants and Refugees
- Community Resources
- Youth issues in counseling
- Resources for youth
- Couples and Family counseling
- Psychospiritual integration

The team is currently working on authoring articles on these topics as the computer programming side of the project ramps up. Pastor Jannett will head up this effort. We intend to assign limited editorial permissions for the synod website to the team, which will provide an efficient way for team members to make updates and add new content.

As for a timeframe, the programming will be accomplished by April 1. The site will be ready for use this Spring, but content can be added indefinitely.

The Synod resolution provides a second project to facilitate and “encourage congregations within the Southeastern Synod, future Synod Assemblies, and Southeastern Leadership Convocations to provide workshops and training for both laity and rostered ministers on the care and support of those dealing with mental illness and on how to cultivate one’s own good mental health.”

Although many congregations in our Synod currently are engaged in raising awareness of mental health topics and providing programming, we recognize the potential for those congregations to share these gifts with others in their local contexts. A key object is thus to facilitate communication across the Synod so that current efforts can be identified and cultivated through partnerships with the Synod and between congregations. A forum will need to be identified for such communication. Currently, the Suicide Prevention Ministry offers a 1-hour workshop on suicide prevention. Any congregations interested can contact Adam Renner or Jerry Weyrauch, and it will also be offered during Synod Assembly. Likewise, Rev. Dr. Brian Hooper has offered to host an Assembly workshop on psychospiritual integration. We hope to continue identifying mental health professionals and leveraging their expertise in the development of new programs.

In sum, we celebrate these seeds that have been planted, and look forward to soon bearing good fruit for the sake of God's people and the church in the world. We anticipate that our term as a taskforce will need to be renewed for another year as we continue to grow into this vital and considerable call.