

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Thoughts on Mothering



"Time is the only thing we all share in common," so the saying goes. We all have the same 24 hours in a day. It is our use of that time that differs. I would add something else we all have in common: we were all born to a mother. It is our experience of "mothers" that varies tremendously.

There are many types of mothers. There are birth moms, adoptive moms, foster moms, step-moms and grandmothers. In our culture today there are descriptive references such as tiger mom, gym mom, martyr mom, and helicopter mom. As a Marriage and Family Therapist, I am grateful to

come alongside clients as they work on their unique concerns related to mothering.

Here are a few examples:

- Grandmothers raising their grandchildren while their parents battle addictions
- Single moms moving back to live with their parents in order to make it financially
- Adults caring for their elderly mothers who suffer from dementia
- Teens and their moms learning to

■ by Charlene Brouwer, MA, LAMFT

- resolve conflict and improve their relationship
- Adults grieving the death of their mother or grandmother
- Mothers grieving estranged relationships with their adult children
- Mothers seeking positive parenting techniques

As human beings, we are dependent on others - from birth through adulthood - for our existence and

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Mental Health and the Local Church

■ by Rev. Mark Timmer



As I have lifted up these prayers in our congregation over the years, the congregation has certainly noticed. It consistently reminds our church community that this is real, that this affects us, and that our prayers are needed. Though it is difficult to judge these things, I think that the heart of the church has grown softer. Others who lead the congregational prayer and other prayer groups have included mental health too. I have also taken a few opportunities over the years to speak briefly and pointedly about the real, silent and often lonely suffering that those who deal with mental illness experience. As we have put this in front of the congregation, those with mental illness and their family members have communicated to me that this public acknowledgement and supplication to God are important to them.

From being public about mental health issues, members and attendees within the church have let me know their personal struggles. I have become "safe" I suppose, and consequently surprised by how many suffer. A few of those who suffer have also, for a time, come together in a loose support group.

Stop Stigma

It increasingly distresses me that those who suffer with mental illness do so in silence and loneliness. The stigma must continue to die away and we must find ways to kill it. Mental illness is, in some ways, like any other health challenge. But it is also something quite different. Mental illness seems to insulate itself against treatment. The treatment of mental illness can itself be trying. Though treatment is often effective, finding what is effective can be a lengthy and frustrating process. There are many who possess this "limp" for the rest of their earthly days. God's people must continue to respond.

May our churches be a God-given refuge for those in need. ■

Rev. Mark Timmer is a Christian Reformed Church pastor and a former Chicago Christian Counseling Center Board Member.

Local Church a Refuge

The local church can and should be a refuge for those with mental illness. We know that it has often not been that. My own life has been significantly impacted by the mental illness of several of those close to me. It has put it on the "radar" of my life and ministry and given me a greater softness for and awareness of mental illness that I did not have earlier in my ministry.

Public Acknowledgement and Supplication

My experience is that the pastor's posture with mental health matters. Our Sunday morning service includes a congregational prayer. This is the congregation's voice to God. It obviously brings us to the throne of grace where there is mercy and grace

"to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Additionally our congregational prayer molds us as a congregation and as individual pray-ers before God. We bring praise and thanks, and also many needs to our God. The chronic needs include joblessness, physical healing, ongoing pain, marriages and relationships that are in disarray, those who are apart from Christ, and the grieving. To this list I have added mental illness. These particular prayers have been for those who suffer, for families and friends who suffer with them, and occasionally for those who do not understand the pain.

That we pray about this need and what we pray about this need shows that this is part of our church's life and struggle.

New Staff & Location

Mary Carnahan, MS, LCPC

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, Melrose Park (NEW) & South Holland, IL



Mary has been privileged to help many struggling people make positive changes in their lives. Learning alternate ways of thinking and adjusting unhealthy behaviors, along with learning effective coping skills are specific techniques that Mary employs to help clients work through struggles and challenges. Faith is an important part of life and is integrated in the healing and growing process. Mary starts seeing clients at age 5 and works with individuals, couples, and families. Mary has counseled clients through many areas including bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, self-worth, oppositional defiant disorder, relationship issues, self-harm, grief and loss, and adjustment to life changes.

Mary earned her MS in Counseling Psychology from University of Central Arkansas, Conway, Arkansas and a BA in Psychology and Youth Leadership from Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois.

Beauty from Tattered Lives

■ by Kathy Konrath, MA, LCPC, LMHC

My life is a mess. I'm too far gone for any good to come out of this. I might as well end it all.

If you can relate to any of these thoughts, you might find hope in the following story. It's called "The Quilt" (adapted; Author unknown).



As I faced my Maker at the last judgment, I knelt before the Lord along with all the other souls. Before each one of us laid our lives, like the squares of a quilt, in many piles. An angel sat before each of us, sewing our quilt squares together into a tapestry that was our life.

As my angel took each piece of cloth from my pile, I noticed how ragged and empty each of my squares was. They were filled with giant holes. Each square was labeled with a part of my life that had been difficult, the challenges and temptations I was faced with in everyday life. I saw mistakes, regrets, and hardships that I endured – these were the largest holes of all.

I glanced around me. Other people seemed to have beautiful patches. Other than a tiny hole here and there, their tapestries were filled with rich color and the bright hues of worldly fortune and esteem. I gazed upon my own life and was disheartened. My angel was sewing the ragged pieces of cloth together, threadbare and empty, like binding air.

Finally the time came when each life was to be displayed, held up to the light, the scrutiny of truth. The others rose, each in turn, holding up their tapestries. Their lives had been so full.

My angel looked upon me, and nodded for me to rise. My gaze dropped to the ground in shame. My life was not much to speak of. I had love in my life, and laughter. But there had also been trials of illness and death; mistakes and false accusations that took from me my world as I knew it. I had to start over many times. I often struggled with the temptation to quit, only to somehow muster the strength to pick up and keep going. I spent many nights on my knees in prayer, asking for help and guidance. My life was a mess most of the time, and now I was handing over evidence to prove it. I had to face the truth. My life was what it was, and I had to accept it as such.

I rose and slowly lifted the combined squares of my life to the light. An awe-filled gasp filled the air. I gazed around at the others who stared at me with wide eyes. Then, I looked upon the tapestry before me.

Light flooded the many holes, creating an image, the face of Christ. Then our Lord stood before me. With warmth and love in His eyes, He said, "Every time you gave your life over to Me, it became My life, My hardships, and My struggles. Each point of light in your life is when you stepped aside and let Me shine through, until there was more of Me than there was of you".

Hold up your brokenness to God and see what becomes of it.

This story speaks to the hope that God has a plan for us. It reflects the hope that Christ can take my mistakes, my deliberate (at times rebellious) sin, my pride and my "missing the mark" attempts, and somehow make it work. The beauty of a pained life and troubled heart can be seen when it is held up to the true Light which is Jesus. God promises to use "all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The phrase "all things together" conjures up the image of a seamstress sewing pieces together. God, like a master seamstress, can make it work. I love tapestries. But I would probably toss out one that was threadbare and worn. What good can come from a bunch of ripped rags? Unless...there was something to be seen through the rips and tears. There is only one way to find out. Hold up your brokenness to God and see what becomes of it. There is a light that might shine through it which would otherwise be swallowed up by an image of perfection. The next time you become aware of the ripped and tattered pieces of you, hold it up to the Light (John 8:12).

May all our quilts be threadbare and worn, allowing Christ to shine through. ■



Kathy Konrath, MA, is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (IL) and Licensed Mental Health Counselor (IN). She sees clients in our Evergreen Park, IL and Schererville, IN locations.



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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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survival. We thrive when our needs for physical and emotional safety and comfort are met. While those needs can be met through a variety of people and relationships, our healthy attachment to a primary mothering figure is powerfully significant.

What does "mothering" mean? What does it mean to you? Synonyms include words like nurture, protect, tend to, take care of, watch, nurse, and treasure. These are all positive words. It is our nature to crave this kind of mothering.

But it's also our human nature to be imperfect. We fall short daily, often disappointing ourselves and others. Our mothers fell short too, sometimes in

devastating ways. At times we experience the opposite of mothering, such as neglect, hurt, disregard and injury.

Jesus understands our humanity. He wants us to come to him to be tended to, to be nurtured and protected. I love the mothering imagery Jesus used in his words recorded in Luke 13:34, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

Are we willing to come to Jesus with our pain and disappointment related to mothering? To come to him with our

regrets and failings, our wounds and scars, our feelings of hopelessness and despair? He longs to gather us close to him, to cover us in his perfect and unconditional love. ■



Charlene Brouwer is a Licensed Associate Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our Evergreen Park & Orland Park locations.