

CARe - Congregational Action and Response for Mental Health

Report to the 2017 Area Gatherings Synod of Alberta and the Territories

God calls us, through the Gospel, to serve all people as we are able.

CARe is a Synod initiative to promote mental wellness and health in our congregations and in our communities. Mental wellness and health issues are a serious concern in our society and our congregations. It is estimated that one in five Canadians is living with a mental health issue. Individuals and their families, and our communities, are affected significantly. The people of the Church and in our congregations, have a special role to play in supporting all persons to achieve mental health. Our Lutheran theology speaks very much to mental well-being.

Bishop Kochendorfer established CARe as a Ministry Team to guide the ministry, supported by an initial designated grant of \$100,000.00 to the Synod to be used for a Mental Health Awareness Initiative.

CARe focuses on the following priorities:

- raising awareness of the reality of mental health issues in congregations;
- educating and training lay people and rostered leaders about mental illness, and helpful responses;
- identifying and providing resources available to congregations; and
- encouraging the development of local responses by congregations.

There are two fundamental goals:

- to assist congregations to become more informed of mental health issues in society and the church; and
- to share resources and ideas within the Synod.

There are clearly organizations and agencies which are already addressing these issues. There are initiatives within church bodies related to mental health issues that can inform our work. The Initiative melds these resources with a faith perspective.

The Ministry Team is actively engaged in how best to bring these resources to the people and congregations of the Synod, and how best to work with congregations so that they can support and minister to people, families and communities wherever and in whatever way mental health is an issue.

Work to Date:

- The ABT Synod website has a page which focuses on CARe; it provides information and resources which congregations are encouraged to be aware of and use.
- CARe has researched the most supportive and effective ways to make use of existing mental health resources. In addition to linking with Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries, the Team has especially found that the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) program of the Mental Health Commission of Canada is a very useful, straightforward and easily accessible resource for congregations and people wanting to take part in the priorities of the ministry. "MHFA is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis." MHFA is easily accessed through the internet (as are other resources).

- Workshops and presentations:
 - The Synod Study Conference in January 2016 (with presenter Sharon Smith of Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries) was a means of raising awareness and discussing the Initiative.
 - The April 23, 2016 Congregational Life Event in Red Deer focused on mental health and wellness, again with Sharon Smith as main presenter, and with a variety of workshops.
 - Grace Lutheran Church, Hinton, organized and held a series of workshops with presenter resources from within the Synod.
 - CARE encourages and promotes local groupings of congregations and church leaders in their own organizing of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) workshops; it provides the financial resources and assistance in organizing these.
 - The Ministry Team and Synod leaders, and members of congregations have participated in two CARE-organized, two-day MHFA workshops.
- CARE encouraged the Edmonton Diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada to hold a MHFA workshop for rostered leaders of the Anglican Church.
- CARE provides financial support to congregations through \$100.00 “scholarships” in support of members enrolling in MHFA’s own workshops – up to three per congregation. MHFA’s own workshops are provided by trained facilitators in many places across the Synod, and have varying focuses. To this point some 60 individuals from Synod congregations have taken advantage of these scholarships.
- A congregational worship resource was developed in partnership with the Synod’s Worship Ministry Team.
- The Ministry allocated funds to the Bishop in support of the Synod’s clergy-assistance and support program.

Going Forward:

- The theme of the Synod’s 2018 Congregational Life Event will be mental health and wellness, with a MHFA presenter and workshops.
- A MHFA workshop is scheduled for the Calgary area for November; it is fully subscribed and a wait list has been established for the possibility of further workshop opportunities.
- Team members continue to be available to meet with local groups to provide information, encouragement and support for workshops and scholarships.
- The Ministry Team continues to develop additional ways that congregations and their members can be assisted in this important ministry. (The Team met at the All Ministry Team meeting in Red Deer on May 7, 2016.)
- Encouragement and financial support for locally-organized MHFA workshops continues.
- CARE has agreed to support one workshop a year for each of the next two years, with the 2016 Congregational Life Event being the first of these.
- The individual MHFA-related “scholarship” program (described above) continues, and congregations and individuals are encouraged to take advantage of this.
- The Team has information on the report and recommendations of the provincial government’s Mental Health Commission, and will be considering how it might provide support and encouragement for that.
- The Team is more and more coming to realize that a mental health ministry intersects with the Synod’s ministries addressing many other negative issues for people and congregations – suicide, poverty, housing, for example - and that further opportunities for intersectional ministry remain to be developed.

- The CARE Ministry Team looks forward to working with the Bishop in a new Synod organizational structure broadly focused on social justice.

CARe aims to do more than talk about the issue – we want to **make a difference**.

Submitted by Carl Sorensen

On behalf of the CARE Ministry Team:

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Rev. Mike Lynch (representative of the Anglican Church)

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