

July, 2020
Southern Ohio/Kentucky District Newsletter
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Covid-19 and Mental Health

America seems to be in the midst of a perfect storm when it comes to mental health. Coronavirus, job loss and financial hardship, racial injustice and unrest are all in the headlines. With suicide rates up 33% over the last 2-3 years in the United States, experts predict those rates will skyrocket with coronavirus and other stressors. One suicide hotline reported an 800% rise in calls this year. Addictions, whether food, alcohol or drugs have skyrocketed. 22% of Americans report drinking more; 1 in 7 marijuana users report more usage; many report unhealthy overeating.

One in three people of all ages report loneliness in isolation. Pregnant women have 70% more anxiety and paranoia. Children miss their friends. Parents trying to work from home without childcare are struggling. Symptoms of fear, paranoia, irritability, helplessness, guilt, worthlessness, anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsiveness and eating disorders are all heightened. The results can include child abuse, domestic abuse, police violence, suicides and public unrest.

Because mental illness is increasing, the FCC will open a 988 number to call when in need, starting July 16, 2020. Similar to 911, 988 will address mental health crises and suicide. This line will feed into the current National Suicide Hotlines: 1-800-TALK (8255). Statistics show that contact and conversation with just one person can prevent many suicides.

What can we as pastors and parishioners do to help? A few suggestions include reaching out to others by phone or other social media platforms, sending cards and notes of encouragement to others and encouraging others to reach out to family and friends by social media and phone. We need to pay attention to others' behaviors and encourage persons to seek help if they are severely anxious, depressed or not sleeping.

Self care becomes even more important, especially for caregivers. Suicide rates are increasing among caregivers. It is important to eat healthily, get adequate sleep and to exercise daily. Deep breathing exercises, stretching, praying or meditating daily are important. Research shows even 10 minutes of walking or other large muscle movement improves mood and helps alleviate anxiety. Eating refined carbohydrates and sugar, over drinking alcohol and increased drug usage elevate depression. Continuous, prolonged deep breathing while grounding make it impossible to sustain an anxiety attack.

If one is depressed, highly anxious or has insomnia for more than two weeks, it is important to consult your family physician, psychiatrist or therapist. There are many safe medications which can treat depression, anxiety and insomnia. When one is stressed, often the receptors in the limbic system (responsible for mood and anxiety) malfunction, and the neurotransmitters such as serotonin are greatly diminished. The best treatment for all mental health disorders is a combination of therapy and medication. Remember that most mental health disorders are really physical, biochemical disorders of the brain.

Resources include:

- ◆ **The new 988, mental health emergency and suicide hotline after July 16th.**
- ◆ **Crisis Text Line, text STRENGTH to 741741.**
- ◆ **National suicide hotline 1-800-273- TALK (8255) (the new 988 will feed into the National Suicide Hotline)**

Written by Mary K. Bowman, Ph.D., Ohio psychologist #5039 937-689-3959

Returning to Church-- Recommendations from Your District Board

On Saturday, June 20th, your District Board gathered to handle a few items of business, including our recommendations on best practices during the ongoing pandemic. The Board decided to uphold our previous recommendations, which are in-line with the recently released recommendations from our denomination.

We recommend that churches continue to love one another from afar for the time being.

If churches decide that it is necessary to meet in-person, we strongly recommend following the guidelines and practices released by the denomination which is attached to this letter (Church-of-the-Brethren-checklist-for-reopening-church.pdf), and it can also be found at the following link: [Click here](#)

Our collective understanding of the CoViD-19 virus is constantly changing as the scientific communities continue their research and study. Humbly, we must admit that our knowledge of this virus is incomplete. It is important for us as clergy and lay leaders to continue educating ourselves to the best of our ability about the virus so that we can continue to do our best in making healthy decisions for our church communities.

Annual Conference Moderator Paul Munday recently hosted a Town Hall featuring epidemiologist Dr. Kathryn Jacobsen. The information shared by Dr. Jacobsen is deeply helpful to the discernment of best practices during this time. If you were unable to attend the Town Hall but would like to view the recording, please email cobmoderatorstownhall@gmail.com with your request, and a recording will be sent to you.

Summer Camp In A New Way

The Corona Virus may have stopped many things for many people, but it couldn't stop summer camp for Southern Ohio/Kentucky District. Through the use of computers, I-Phones, Kindles, and I-Pads, we are having camp for all ages.

Each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of the weeks in June and July, 15 to 25 kids and adult volunteers meet through Zoom for a camp setting. Everyone logs on according to their age group and day to be together in this virtual setting. On Friday evenings, we gather as Family Camp for an exciting evening of visiting in each other's homes for fun, faith, and friends.

The camp curriculum is called This Is Our Prayer. All the camps are exploring different ways to pray and the power of prayer through Bible study, singing, crafts, activities and prayer time. We have made prayer bracelets, practiced the five finger prayers, and have prayer partners.

Bible studies have captured our attentions by watching scriptures come alive with Lego people, kids explaining stories, Veggie Tales and other YouTube productions. One group even has a coloring/comic book created just for them by Carl Hill. Who knew that Bible study could be so much fun?

Our creative activities developed by all the volunteers have included prayer bracelets, thank you signs for community helpers to post on our front doors, God's eyes, painted rocks, story characters on paint sticks and candle holders. Family camp got together and made virtual stone soup as a community project. All the supplies for camp were delivered in bags by volunteers so the campers have everything needed for the activities

One interesting factor about virtual camp is that people from far away can participate. We have campers from Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Virginia, and all over Southern Ohio who have joined us for camp. They feel just as close as those who may be next door. One volunteer was called back to her job in Williamsburg, VA, but is still able to connect with us on camp day. Two girls, who met at camp several years ago, were able to reconnect through this camp after one of them moved away from the area.

This adventure in virtual camping is challenging, but rewarding. Yes, we all miss the hugs, closeness of campfires, hiking, swimming, sharing meals, and just being together. However, we are all very safe in our homes. We don't have to wear masks. Many can join camp even though they live far away. God has blessed our district with wonderful, dedicated volunteers willing to step out in faith to make this camp alive, vibrant, and fulfilling to the campers. This is our prayer: camp can change lives, even virtually.

Southern Ohio/Kentucky Disaster Ministries Updates

Ice Cream Social, Share-a-Meal Donations - Even though we're unable to have our annual Ice Cream Social and Share-a-Meals, BDM is able to continue serving disaster survivors through rebuilding homes and assembling Church World Service kits and buckets. You're invited to make a donation of the amount that you would usually spend/donate at the Ice Cream Social on dinner and Share-a-Meal tickets. This will enable the ministry to continue reaching those in need. In 2020 we'll be rebuilding tornado damaged homes in Dayton and flooded homes in Pamlico County, NC. Dates are being set for assembling 1,000 clean-up buckets and 1,000+ school kits. Click here to donate on-line. Checks can be made out to S. Ohio/KY District COB, with BDM on the memo line. Mail checks to S. Ohio/KY COB, PO Box 785, Greenville, OH 45331. Thank you for joining us as we serve Christ, as we serve others together.

Project Updates – The BDM site in Lumberton, NC has moved to Pamlico County, NC. This is closer to the coast and will be additional recovery work from Hurricane Florence. This is the site that is scheduled for our October 11 – 17 crew. The site in Castaner, Puerto Rico has closed. Covid-19 affected our volunteer groups' ability to work at both sites, but arrangements have been made to see that all promised work is completed through contractors and/or other local assistance.

Volunteers Needed for Dayton BDM Site - The Dayton BDM site will be opening on July 13, 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, BDM is counting on local volunteers to be the workers during the initial phase. There will not be any overnight lodging or meals provided during July. In this first phase rebuilding will begin on a smaller scale with a crew of about 8 people. The number of volunteers and the type of skills needed will vary from week to week. Rather than putting out an open call for volunteers in July, we are being asked to create a "Wait List". This list will identify volunteers, their skills, and their availability. From that list, leadership will call volunteers for a week (Monday - Friday) at a time. During this start up stage, it will be important for volunteers to be available for a full week. Volunteers of all skill levels are encouraged to apply.

Let us know if you are able to help. We are compiling a "Wait List" of available volunteers. To apply to volunteer, contact Burt Wolf (SouthernOhioBDM@gmail.com, 937-287-5902). We will then send you the Volunteer Registration and Release Form and the COVID-19 Safety Guidelines Form. These forms will need to be completed, signed, and returned with what weeks during July 13-31 you are available. We must have these forms returned before you can be asked to volunteer. Click here for a poster with more information.

Nebraska Short-term Rebuild - Brethren Disaster Ministries is partnering with The Kings Garden and Omaha Rapid Response to help families affected by historic flooding in March 2019 in King Lake, Nebraska. BDM has planned two weeks, August 16 - 29, 2020, for volunteers to join in this recovery and is welcoming volunteers from all districts. Click here for a poster with more information. Contact Burt Wolf (937-287-5902, SouthernOhioBDM@gmail.com) if you are interested in participating. This will be helpful in coordinating travel and for giving project updates.

PPE Gowns for BRC - Thank you to our sewers! We had 22 sewers who made 112 gowns for the Brethren Retirement Community (BRC). They are very appreciative!

Sewers Needed for Cloth Masks - Sewers are needed to make cloth masks for BRC and for BDM rebuilding sites. Kits have been assembled with pre-cut fabric, elastic, and instructions. Each kit is for 30 masks. Contact Barb Brower at barbbrower51@yahoo.com. Arrangements can be made to pick up the kits or to have them delivered.

Cleanup Buckets – Items are being purchased for Cleanup Buckets for Church World Service (CWS). We will have two assemblies this year, doing 500 each time. We originally planned an assembly in June, but are delaying this due to the current pandemic.

School Kits - Again this year, we hope to assemble 2,500 school kits for CWS. However, we're asking for donations to make this possible. It costs about \$5 per kit, which includes the supplies and \$2 for shipping to the point of need. Let's work together and reach our goal! Checks may be made out to S. Ohio/KY District COB, and footnoted BDM/School Kits. Donations may be sent to S. Ohio/KY District COB, PO Box 785, Greenville, OH 45331.

Happy Corner Music Ministry Position

Happy Corner is seeking a Director of Music Ministry (Part Time). The Director of Music ministry shall be responsible for coordinating the best possible appropriate music for worship services and other church events. He/She shall seek to provide musical leadership, including musical education from children through adult. The Director of Music Ministry will contribute to the larger ministry of the church...Continuing the work of Jesus; peacefully, simply, and together. A complete position description can be found on the district website or email the Happy Corner Church at info@happycornerchurch.org to request

The Church of the Brethren is called to a time of prayer and fasting

By David Steele, general secretary of the Church of the Brethren

Few events have dramatically altered global social, political, and economic realities the way the COVID-19 virus has in just a matter of weeks. To date, over a half a million cases of the virus have been documented around the world. Each country in which the Church of the Brethren has a presence has been affected. In some communities the virus has forced people to shelter at home and in others it has compounded existing needs. I recognize that this is a time of anxiety and even fear. Yet, as persons of faith in Jesus Christ we know that death no longer holds us captive, for we are people of Christ's resurrection.

The Psalm reminds us that though the world quakes, seas roar, and the nations rage, God is our refuge and God is our strength (Psalm 46).

I invite us to join together as a church in fasting and prayer each Friday. By fasting we seek to gather together spiritually before our ever-present God. We do not seek to make statements to our leaders, nor to be noticed by others, but only to center our hearts in the refuge of God's peace. By praying we intercede for our communities that compassion may flourish, that health and safety may reign, and that the peace of Christ will surround the world.

May our prayer together be an offering to our God, and through us may God heal the nations.

Prayer Needs

- With the unrest, protests, and violence as a result of recent deaths and incidents of racism, may we lift this situation in prayer. Racism is still a force of hatred, violence and anger in our country and in our world; we are compelled by the gospel to work to overcome injustice and hate. May our prayers this day be for peace and understanding.

- As a ministry affiliated with the District we have a longstanding and close relationship with the Brethren Retirement Community (BRC). Testing continues among residents and staff. Procedures are being conducted to keep our residents and staff safe. May we all hold the entire BRC family (residents and their families, staff and their families, BRC Board members and their families) in the light of God's grace, mercy, wisdom, and healing in the coming days.

- As the situation with the coronavirus affects persons, families, and travel, may we remember those affected by this outbreak. There are many changing directives, regulations and recommendations affecting our country and way of life, may we remember all those adjusting to this changing world. As some reopening is occurring, may our prayers be for keeping everyone as safe as possible.

- May we lift the family of David Erbaugh in our prayers as David passed away last week. David's wife, Nan, is pastor of the Lower Miami congregation. A memorial service will be held outdoors at the Lower Miami parking lot on July 10.

- May we lift Karen Chronister as she fractured her upper right arm just below the shoulder. Karen reports "I am wearing a brace, no cast, no surgery, but am in a lot of pain. this is a lesson in patience and humility. Prayers appreciated."

- May we lift Kirt Chronister, son of Jim and Karen Chronister, who suffered a stroke and is in a process of recovery and rehabilitation.

- The Constance congregation continues to discern space needs, although temporarily on hold during the pandemic. Our prayers for these sisters and brothers during this time of transition are appreciated.

- May we continue to lift Mary Sue Rosenberger, as she continues to deal with various health issues. MarySue Rosenberger has been receiving care from Hospice since April 2019 because of Pulmonary Fibrosis which had been first diagnosed in the fall of 2017.

- May we remember those congregations in pastoral transition - Mark Lancaster is serving as interim at Good Shepherd; Fred Bernhard is serving as interim pastor at Brookville during this time of transition; their profile is now posted. White Cottage has entered an agreement with a neighboring congregation to supply pastoral services during a time of transition and discernment. Tara Hornbacker is serving as interim at New Carlisle, their search team has completed their profile. Mel Smith, pastor at Charleston, has retired. May we offer our prayers of love and support for the members of the Bear Creek congregation as they seek new church homes.

- May we remember the possibility of a new church starts in various locations in our district as well as the urban ministry team for revitalizing some of our urban churches.

- There are many issues and situations continuing to face us as we minister in our respective locations, including those who are serving in interim situations and others who are in discernment regarding placement or are considering a move. There are others facing health issues, please keep these situations in prayer.

Please contact me if you know of prayer situations of which I should be aware. May we lift each other in prayer as we work to continue the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together.