

**What are some things that people in a congregation can do?**

- End the silence. Talk about your or your family's own experience with mental illness with ministers and others
- Greet newcomers to your congregation, particularly those who may seem isolated.
- Offer an educational presentation on Mental Illness- like In Our Own Voice
- Learn about your denomination's position on inclusion of people affected by mental illness and share the information
- Identify and make available mental health resources in your community
- Support or train congregational caregivers in helping people with mental illness
- Offer the same assistance to a family with mental illness as to a family with other illnesses, like cancer or heart disease
- Visit members of the church who are hospitalized for a mental illness

**For information contact**

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**Enabling Ministry and  
Congregational Support  
for People and Families  
Affected  
by Mental Illness**

**Congregational  
Outreach Group of  
Mercer County**

## Mental Illness

Every year, about one in five adults has a diagnosable mental disorder. Five to seven percent of adults and five to nine percent of children have a disabling mental illness.

Almost everyone's life has been touched in some way by mental illness, by the illness or by its effect on a loved one or friend. When someone you care about becomes ill, the burden is great.

**Mercer Congregational Outreach Group** was developed by local mental health professionals, clergy, mental health consumers and family members in 1992. It operates under the auspices of the Mercer County Mental Health Board, with the support of the Mercer County Mental Health Administrator

### Why Mental Illness Awareness?

- 7 % of adults and children have a disabling mental illness- 23,000 people in Mercer County alone
- At least one in four families copes with the challenges brought on by a family member experiencing serious mental illness.
- More hospital beds are occupied by people with serious mental illness than by persons with cancer, lung disease, and heart disease combined.
- Two decades of studies have consistently shown that approximately 40 percent of persons seeking professional help with mental disorders turn first to clergy.
- Mental illness is the leading cause of disability in America.

**The Congregational Outreach Group encourages assist and supports Faith Communities in embracing and ministering to the needs of people with mental illnesses and their families, with awareness, sensitivity, responsiveness and caring.**

**To accomplish this we provide**

- *education and training,*
- *networking and*
- *resource sharing.*

Churches are called to seek justice, offer compassion and hospitality, and engage in reconciling ministry with persons with mental illnesses as well as others in need.

### Why Congregational Awareness ?

- There is no faith that does not feel called to minister to all people, regardless of condition.
- People with mental illness and their families lose connections and suffer heavily from isolation and stigma & Extending compassion and creating community are central to congregational life
- Recovery from mental illness is both possible and likely and is spiritual and social , biological and psychological

- Faith is about giving meaning to experience and to suffering and restoring hope. Faith and hope are needed in recovery.
- Recovery is about restoring dignity, value and self-respect & Faith communities value people for who and how they care, not what they've done or earn.

### Services

- **Quarterly workshops and trainings on**
  - mental illness,
  - treatment and treatment resources
  - How to support and include people affected by mental illness and there families
  - How spiritual beliefs, values and communities support people with mental illness in their recovery
- **In Our Own Voice** presentations on living with mental illness
- **DVD's, books and pamphlets** on how congregations can support people and families with mental illness. These are available for loan.
- **Consultation and discussion** with clergy, congregational leaders and members on creating more inclusive congregations and ministering to people and families affected by mental illness
- **Newsletter** on congregational supports, with information on resources and activities through public presentations describing their own experience of illness and recovery.