

Prayer Vigil for Mental Health Awareness

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor

Tuesday, 30 October 2018 11:07 - Last Updated Wednesday, 31 October 2018 05:46



First Presbyterian Church of Beaufort will host a prayer vigil on Wednesday, November 7th, with a special focus on those whose lives have been affected by mental illness. The public is invited to drop by our sanctuary any time between 7 am and 7 pm. Our doors will be open, prayer booklets available, and candles there for the lighting. Come as you are, stay as long as you like, and bring a friend. All are welcome.

The prayer vigil is part of a new Mental Health Awareness initiative at FPC, where America's skyrocketing depression and suicide rates have hit very close to home. In a few short years, we've lost several members of our congregation to this devastating epidemic. Out of that heartbreak, God has called together a committee to help educate and enlighten our community about mental illness – starting with ourselves – and to support those who struggle, along with the people who love them.

Some statistics: One in five adults will experience mental illness this year. Nearly one in 25 adults (10 million) live with serious mental illness. Suicide rates in the U.S. have risen almost 30% in less than two decades. Ninety percent of those who die by suicide have an underlying mental illness.

The Mental Health Awareness committee at FPC aims to get its collective brain around these statistics in hopes that we might combat them. Most of our committee members feel deeply and personally called to this work.

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“Between personal bouts of post-partum depression, having spent over 20 years doing home visits in the public health arena, and now working with new moms and teens dealing with mental health issues – subsidized by the suicides in our church and community – there is no way I can *not* be involved in promoting mental health,” says committee member Nan Krueger.

“My passion for working on mental health has come from the personal impact mental illness has had on our whole family,” says Mary Tatum, also on the committee. “Mental illness is a brain disorder and very difficult to understand and treat. Fear of those who suffer is often the case. Breaking down these barriers is the goal. My hope is that our community will become aware that those who have mental illness are not to be feared, but should be embraced and helped just as those who suffer from other physical illnesses are.”

Committee chair Susan Meyer is equally passionate about our mission. “I want to change the way we talk about mental health,” she says. “We need to stop being embarrassed or ashamed. Having depression (or any other mental health challenge) is not the ‘fault’ of anyone, anymore than being diagnosed with cancer or MS is someone’s fault. And talking about mental health also means we need to recognize that we must change our language. We need to rid ourselves of “wacko,” “nutjob,” “headcase,” just to name a few. Would we use these derogatory words to describe someone with cancer or MS? Of course not.”

“Second, and more personally,” Meyer continues, “I don’t want anyone to feel alone – either the person suffering or those who love them. Too many suffer in silence, because of shame and embarrassment, or because they don’t know where to get help. Which leads me to my third reason for serving, which is access. We not only need more mental health providers, but we also need to make sure everyone has access to and knows where to find that help. Communities need to have information readily available so people know where to turn.”

“Families dealing with mental health issues don’t want to be there,” says Nan Krueger. “It’s hard and sometimes a long, drawn out business. But to learn how to better support them/us? How to be empathetic and useful? How not to gloss over the pain? How to listen better and actively? Those are things that we, as humans, can do for each other. And being part of our FPC family just brings it home.”

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The upcoming prayer vigil is the first of many events being planned by the Mental Health Awareness committee at FPC. In early December, the church will host its annual Blue Christmas service, for anybody who struggles with loss, grief, or just plain old seasonal blues during the holidays. Again, our doors will be open to the Beaufort community and beyond.

“If we can make a change in our little corner of the world, it will hopefully have a ripple effect,” says Susan Meyer. “Like a stone tossed in the water.”

For more information about the Prayer Vigil on November 7th or the Blue Christmas service on December 2nd, visit www.firstpresbeaufort.org or call 843-524-3051. First Presbyterian Church is located at the corner of North and Church Streets in downtown Beaufort.