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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



# Disability Ministries

## **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK**

September marked Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and Oct. 7-13 was Mental Health Awareness Week. Disability Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has engaged the topic of mental illness and learning disabilities over the past year as an expanded understanding of its work.

At the Youth Extravaganza 2018 in January, the ministry invited the Rev. Hollie Holt-Woehl, adjunct professor of pastoral care at Luther Seminary, and Emily Schmidlin, a family and youth therapist, to conduct two workshops about mental illness among youth and young adults. Attendance for the sessions was wonderful – so much so that we knew this is a real concern for our faith leaders and families. In July, amid National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, we sought to gain clearer understandings of attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which impacts the behaviors of summer campers and school-age children in ways that can interfere with relating well with friends and family. (The National Institute on Mental Illness attributes symptoms of hyperactivity and lack of attention to differences in brain chemistry and processing, yet treatment often includes both psychiatric medication and behavioral science approaches.) In September, we granted funds for a preschool (Thrive Day School in Charlotte, N.C.) that is addressing autism and children with special learning needs.



All year, ELCA Disability Ministries also has been attentive to the ways in which physical or sensory disabilities, or even chronic pain, contribute to symptoms of depression and anxiety. Likewise, life experiences can contribute to intense and prolonged feelings of fear and anxiety; for example, someone who has lived through a natural disaster such as Hurricane Maria, a woman who confronts her sexual assailant publicly in court hearings, a teen who witnesses a mass shooting at school, or even a child

who goes to school each day worrying that a parent might be wrongfully arrested because of accusations of being an undocumented immigrant. The brain is an amazing organ of the body that demonstrates resilience, yet its regenerative powers require a sense of safety, a period of rest and a time for processing to make sense of what's happened.

As a ministry, we are listening carefully to how persons with mental illness experience the preaching and teaching of certain biblical narratives that might associate mental illness with demons or a lack of faith. We believe many churches (of all denominations) can benefit from greater awareness about mental health and ways in which we can better companion persons living with anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, trauma and a variety of mental health challenges, as well as the family members who care for them. In listening to what the church says, we're thankful for ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's compassionate message about death by suicide. It's likely none of us truly desires to end a life that God has created and designed for goodness in the world, yet the rate of suicide and violence against others today, even by persons in authority, is overwhelming. We continue to grow in awareness, yet we also recognize that perhaps there are some misconceptions that the church contributes to as it seeks to understand mental health. Similarly, congregations wish to be supportive but are not always certain about how to be in relationship with persons living with mental illness or in recovery.

Mental illness can be isolating and contribute to feelings of loneliness and desperation. Most mental illnesses are treated, rather than healed or cured, yet appropriate social and spiritual support can provide additional comfort and security. Because God has made humanity with intelligences that continue to advance medical understanding of our minds and bodies, we must recognize that medical science has advanced and our knowledge has increased because of God's gifts of skill in the vocation of specialists – psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists. Yet, the first step toward wellness is being made to feel safe, comforted, listened to, and offered time to process the experience in ways that are tolerable and timely based on a person's needs. Prayer can help this process, especially when accessible with another person safely guiding it; music in worship carries joy, hope and reassurance amidst recovery; and confession invites opportunities for each of us to name the ways in which we can admit that we are human, vulnerable and imperfect, but that we can place our trust in Christ. The church can be a great place for healing to start or continue.

# PSYCHOLOGY

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**ELCA Disability Ministries has recently been notified of a \$250,000 gift from the “Where Needed Most Fund” of Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA.** We have decided to share this gift with ELCA congregations, synods and ELCA affiliates (i.e. small ministry organizations, educational affiliates and independent Lutheran organizations) through a Mental Health Ministry project. We invite you to share with those you know an opportunity to receive an award of up to \$10,000 by partnering with a mental health organization such as Suicide Prevention Ministry, Pathways to Promise, or the National Alliance for Mental Illness. We will be able to do 25 or more grants for this project beginning immediately and are looking for your help in sharing this good news before the application deadline of Jan. 31, 2019. Please visit our [website \(elca.org/disability\)](http://elca.org/disability) to learn more about the grant through the “Request for Proposals.”



**Find additional information on Disability Ministries.**  
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## Celebrations and collaborations

The ELCA is living into the [Future Directions 2025 intentions](#): Carol Josefowski, coordinator of ELCA Disability Ministries, was excited to receive an invitation to attend the installation service of Bishop Patricia Ann Curtis Davenport of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. It was held at a historic building that previously served as a school for deaf and mute children in Philadelphia. Sign language was present throughout the service. Davenport is the first African American woman elected as an ELCA synod bishop. Representation of congregations, synods, the Lutheran Center, and ecumenical and interfaith partners all participated in the celebration. Davenport is a member of the African Descent Lutheran Association (Philadelphia chapter) and the Black Clergy of Philadelphia, and is active with Christians United Against Addictions.

We give God all the glory for this momentous era of time where she, Bishop Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld (South-Central Synod of Wisconsin) and Bishop Idalia Negròn Caamaño (Caribbean Synod) – three women of color – have been elected as synod bishops. These synods have posted an employment opportunity to hire new directors for evangelical mission to help fulfill their missions. Visit [elca.org/careers](http://elca.org/careers) for more details.

**Deaf Ministry:** As coordinator for Disability Ministries, Carol visited with the ELCA director for Deaf Ministries, the Rev. Beth Lockard, and attended Christ the King's Deaf Lutheran Church worship service in Westchester, Pa., on Sept. 23. What a beautiful ministry, which is doing so many great service projects as DeafCan!, involving immigration, incarcerated persons, and relationship-building between the deaf culture, blind culture and deaf-blind culture. The Spirit poured out upon us in our time together, and Carol is thankful for our ability to collaborate and support one another's work!

**Living Lutheran magazine:** Don't miss Living Lutheran's October issue and the article written by Cindy Uken, "Legacy ministry creates space for all abilities." It features a story about Central Lutheran Church of Mondovi, Wis., the recipient of a \$5,000 Disability Ministries grant.

**Living into Future Directions 2025:** We continue to build relationships with our ministry partners who have distinct and similar experiences of marginalization in society and sometimes the church.



In August, Disability Ministries invited ELCA members doing disability-related ministries through a synod office or collaborative group to gather at the Lutheran Center with the team. Together we shared about our work, challenges and successes. We then divided into three working groups for which ELCA Disability Ministries plans to formulate teams – a Localized Active Ministries Team, Resource Development/Tools for Adaptive Practices Team, and Grant Review/Program Impact Statements Team. In November, ELCA Disability Ministries plans to establish monthly conference calls for each of these teams to gather by Zoom.

***If you are interested in joining a Disability Ministries networking team, please send your full name, ELCA***

***congregation/synod name, and email address to [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org).*** We seek to network and assist one another in identifying resources and invite others of the church to join in our work of making church accessible for all.

In September, as coordinator of ELCA Disability Ministries, Carol met with the program director for Latino Ministries, the Rev. Hector Carrasquillo; members of the Latino Strategies Network; Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) executive director Don Johnson; and members of the LOM network to discuss possibilities for events that intersect race and gender identity. They are considering working with Disability Ministries for various other projects and express support of our work. We likewise support the work of each of the ethnic specific ministries. Carol will meet with the Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries team in October about additional ways in which we can support one another's ongoing work in ministry.

**Find additional information on Disability Ministries or contact us.**  
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