



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

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2 NRSV).

Since the global pandemic was declared in March 2020, many of us have endured extended emotional and psychological anguish. That experience may be dramatically worsened by the ugly realities of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia or poverty. Our anguish has taken the form of sadness in isolation, anxiety in uncertainty, grief over loss, stress over economic challenges and worry over events beyond our control — including the tremendous impact of the crisis on our children. This pandemic threatens our mental health just as much as our physical health. For millions of us adults living in the United States, receiving the vaccine and the hope it brings has alleviated our unease, sorrow and grief.

This past year has provided some of us with a deeper understanding of and empathy for the ongoing mental health challenges endured by our neighbors, friends and family. During Mental Health Awareness Month, especially, our church intentionally recognizes the anguish our siblings in Christ experience daily — pandemic or no — and the fear many of them feel about sharing their stories.

As a church we also acknowledge the true depths of these invisible illnesses. Our children, neighbors and friends grappling with mental health issues need to know that God does not love them any less. They need to hear that they, too, are embraced by God's unfathomable love.

Our church cautions against judgmental words and actions that might suggest to someone that their faith is not strong enough or that their outlook on life would improve if they would change certain behaviors. Praying, socializing and exercising are great activities that can help someone get out of a slump or move past a painful episode. But this is not always the solution for moderate or severe depression, bipolar depression, anxiety or even grief. Telling someone they aren't doing enough to be happy creates a sense of stigma that they are not living "correctly." We need to listen so that our words of care and compassion guide others to the help they need. We need to support people in their struggles, walking side by side in partnership with them through the good days and the bad.

Dear church, God loves us all. No matter how we are grappling, we are not alone; God is with us. Throughout May and beyond, we must seek ways to erase the stigma surrounding mental illness and continually love everyone compassionately as a child of God. We must embrace the benefits of therapy and encourage the use of medication when necessary in supporting and sustaining mental health and wellness. We must also work to ensure access to affordable mental health care for all people, especially those living in poverty or in historically marginalized communities.

Our faith teaches that caring for health is a shared endeavor. Being the body of Christ means carrying one another's burdens; it also means placing our burdens in God's hands and admitting to a caring person close to us that we need help. This is true no matter how great or small our anguish may be.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'E'.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

["The Body of Christ and Mental Illness"](#)
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