

**Mental Health Ministry
Lenten Discussion Series
[Created by Jackie Peck]**

Six 1-hour Sessions

Immediate Goal:

- 1) Provide discussion space for changing attitudes about mental illness

Longer Term Goals:

- 2) Become a WISE Congregation [<http://mhn-ucc.blogspot.com/p/wise-congregations.html>]
- 3) Participate in the WISE Congregation Conference [<http://mhn-ucc.blogspot.com/p/wise-congregations.html>]
- 4) With Pastor's leadership, shape a fully engaging Mental Health Sunday May 20, 2018.

Tentative Session Topic Overview

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| Session 1 | Changing Attitudes |
| Session 2 | Where do we at KUCC have spaces for telling our stories (Lund 1) |
| Session 3 | How can we use our stories to affirm that what is broken can be made whole again (Lund 3) |
| Session 4 | Restorative Justice--Where and how do we express God's love for ALL God's children? (Lund 4) |
| Session 5 | How can we better care for the care-givers, the families of persons with mental illness? (Lund 6) |
| Session 6 | Becoming a WISE Congregation |

Format : Short reads and partner discussion strategies; participants tell their stories; action planning.

Invite Stephen Ministers, UYF to participate and/or help plan specific sessions. Explore further coordination with race discussions.

Resources

Blessed Are the Crazy (Lund, 2014)

<http://mhn-ucc.blogspot.com/>

Children's Mental Health Network

Mental Health America

NAMI

Changing Attitudes

Session 1 [February 18]

Welcome to this safe space. Series leader shares the primary goal of creating and nurturing a safe space (e.g., non-judgmental, confidentially secure unless permission is given to share more widely) for sharing our stories in ways that challenge popularly held attitudes toward mental illness. It's through changed attitudes that we find healing. Through the discussion we can bring our congregation further into the process of becoming WISE [show on screen or poster] [2 min].

Introduce ourselves by first name [2 min].

Prayer (Pastor or another participant)

Today's Focus Question: What attitudes impact mental illness and what are the outcomes?

Lead-in activity: Jot the earliest memories you have of attitudes toward mental illness—the attitudes held by family or friends, through sermons or Sunday school, or just generally through the culture where you grew up [2-3 min or so]. Turn and share with one other person [take as much time as needed]. Report out as comfortable.

Do we, here at KUCC, invite those stories, and do we have safe spaces for telling them? If so, where? [Chart responses.] Might there be other spaces we could offer? [Chart responses]

Short Reading Activity:

Excerpt from Preface of *Blessed Are the Crazy* (Lund, pp. xi-xii). As you read, mark any parts that resonate with you. Turn and talk with one other to share your thoughts. Report out as comfortable.

Concluding thought: (D. Capps, Princeton Theological Seminary) The key to the healing process is testifying to the role mental illness has played in our lives which frees us from “our prisons of fear, shame, and pain, and open[s] the doors to liberated lives based on hope, healing, and love” (Lund, p. vii).

[If time] **Listen to Stafford's poem:**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52880/a-message-from-the-wanderer>

Next Session's Focus Q: Where do we at KUCC have spaces for telling our stories (testifying)?

Close with Prayer

Excerpt from Preface of *Blessed Are the Crazy* by Sarah Griffith Lund (2017).

NOTE: The author recognizes that the language used in talking about mental illness can be controversial. She writes, "I use the language that most closely reflects my experiences."

"We can preach our own testimonies. We can tell our own truths. God gives us permission and the church needs to hear it. We don't have to pretend that everything is okay, because it is not...It is in the offering and receiving of testimony that hope can be found. This is what we are born to do.

...I unfold my story and discover the surprising ways that God shows up: in a mentally ill father's love, in a suicidal brother's cry for help, in a cousin's dying eyes, and in my own discovery of God's power to heal. It is in the telling of this story that I've come to appreciate how God's blessing is meant for all of us, especially for people who are marginalized and suffering, including those of us with crazy in the blood.

In the conversations with friends, family members, pastors, mentors, spiritual advisors and mental health counselors, I have come to learn that my story is part of the greater story of millions of people whose loved ones suffer from mental illness...

...[M]y testimony is for anyone who is afraid to admit that there is a problem with the stigma and shame surrounding mental illness in our churches and in our society, because then the next question is even more foreboding: What can be done about it?" (p. xi-xii).

A Message from the Wanderer by William E. Stafford

Today outside your prison I stand
and rattle my walking stick: Prisoners, listen;
you have relatives outside. And there are
thousands of ways to escape.

Years ago I bent my skill to keep my
cell locked, had chains smuggled to me in pies,
and shouted my plans to jailers;
but always new plans occurred to me,
or the new heavy locks bent hinges off,
or some stupid jailer would forget
and leave the keys.

Inside, I dreamed of constellations—
those feeding creatures outlined by stars,
their skeletons a darkness between jewels,
heroes that exist only where they are not.

Thus freedom always came nibbling my thought,
just as—often, in light, on the open hills—
you can pass an antelope and not know
and look back, and then—even before you see—
there is something wrong about the grass.
And then you see.

That's the way everything in the world is waiting.

Now—these few more words, and then I'm
gone: Tell everyone just to remember
their names, and remind others, later, when we
find each other. Tell the little ones
to cry and then go to sleep, curled up
where they can. And if any of us get lost,
if any of us cannot come all the way—
remember: there will come a time when
all we have said and all we have hoped
will be all right.

There will be that form in the grass.

Changing Attitudes

Session 2 [February 25]

Welcome to this safe space. Series leader shares the primary goal of creating and nurturing a safe space (e.g., non-judgmental, confidentially secure unless permission is given to share more widely) for sharing our stories in ways that change popularly held attitudes toward mental illness. It's through changed attitudes that we find healing. Through the discussion we can bring our congregation further into the process of becoming WISE [show on screen or poster] [2 min].

Introduce ourselves if there are first time participants [2 min].

Prayer (Pastor or another participant)

Today's Focus Question: Where do we at KUCC have spaces for telling our mental health stories (testifying)?

Lead-in activity: Last session, we heard that often people don't want to hear about our painful stories. They want us to "get over it" or maybe our stories bring them fearfully to the brink of their own vulnerability. Sometimes even in churches people feel others don't want to hear their story. Often, they feel isolated. Here's what Sarah Griffith Lund writes: "Church taught me a lot about a loving God, but not how to tell my own story about love, or the lack of it. My Sunday school teachers wanted me to learn about God's love for the world and that this love sent Jesus to save us. But no one in Sunday school ever asked me what I needed saving from in my own life" (p. 7). Share thoughts [5-8 min]

Short Reading Activity:

Sarah Griffith Lund found her voice without using words! Excerpt from Preface of *Blessed Are the Crazy* (Lund, p 7, 10-11). As you read, mark any parts that resonate with you. Turn and talk with one other to share your thoughts. Report out as comfortable.

Concluding thought: "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you" [Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*]. To tell the story is to heal [Lund, p. 92]. Transition to next Session's Focus Q....

Next Session's Focus Q: How can we use our mental health stories to affirm that what is broken can be made whole again? David Hassler from Wick Poetry Center will join us and share poems of healing.

Close with Prayer

Excerpt from *Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence About Mental Illness, Family, and Church* by Sarah Griffith Lund (2017).

NOTE: The author recognizes that the language used in talking about mental illness can be controversial. She writes, "I use the language most closely reflects my experiences."

"During my senior year of high school I signed up for a two-hour Advanced Placement art class. In a way that Sunday school couldn't, creating art helped me begin to tell my own story. Through layers of colors, shapes, and textures, I expressed what was going on inside my mind and heart. Mixing media--markers, acrylics, pencils--and making my own geometric stamps out of cardboard, I layered colors, shapes, and images. First yellow triangles, then red circles, followed by purple rectangles, all one of top of another, blurring boundaries and shapes. Something inside of me broke open in art and spilled onto paper (p. 7).

I remember that as I painted, I spoke to none of the other students in the class, wanting to totally disappear into the changing colors. I simply moved my body, hands, and eyes, connecting paint to paper without thinking. In the art, I created my own reality, free from other people's definitions or expectations. I made my own sanctuary in the swirling colors of paint. When the paint dried, I crammed the paintings into my thickening portfolio. I didn't look at them again until the end of the year, when I laid out all the pieces, and they covered the entire surface of all the tables in the class room. It looked like a rainbow exploded. Something I could not articulate in words found fluency in art. My art teacher nominated me as 'most improved student' at the senior class awards ceremony. I was shocked. It was the first time I realized that telling my story through art allowed me to express my true self and also connected me to others" (p. 10-11).

Changing Attitudes

Session 3 [March 4]

Welcome to this safe space. Series leader shares the primary goal of creating and nurturing a safe space (e.g., non-judgmental, confidentially secure unless permission is given to share more widely) for sharing our stories in ways that change popularly held attitudes toward mental illness. It's through changed attitudes that we find healing. Through the discussion we can bring our congregation further into the process of becoming WISE [show on screen or poster] [2 min].

Introduce ourselves if there are first time participants [2 min].

Prayer (Pastor or another participant)

Today's Focus Question: How can we use our mental health stories to affirm that what is broken can be made whole again? Said another way, **how can we share stories of hope?**

Lead-in activity: Last session, we expanded our understanding of 'safe spaces' for telling our stories. We also recognized the isolation that often accompanies experiences with mental illness, and we know how worrisome this is for family members and caregivers.

Sarah Griffith Lund describes how loving a family member with a mental illness is often a cross to bear. Take a few minutes to read this passage. Then talk with one other person about what resonates with you. [Report out as comfortable.] [10 min]

Healing Through Poetry: Today we welcome David Hassler, Director of the Wick Poetry Center, Kent State University. With his leadership, we'll use poetry as a way into transformation.

We read Rumi's *The Guest House*, and shared our thoughts. Mary, a church member who is in mental illness recovery, read one of her poems and we responded.

Concluding thought: [Lund, p. 22] "Freedom from abusive relationships, isolation, and depression were important parts of my vision of the kingdom of God." They are important parts of a mental health ministry too. Transition to next Session's Focus Q....

Next Session's Focus Q: Where and how do we express God's love for *all* God's children?

Close with Prayer

Excerpt from *Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence About Mental Illness, Family, and Church* by Sarah Griffith Lund (2017).

NOTE: The author recognizes that the language used in talking about mental illness can be controversial. She writes, "I use the language most closely reflects my experiences."

"Jesus said that people who follow him must take up their crosses. I used to think this was a curse, a sick punishment from God. But what if crosses just exist, like mental illness just exists? My brother did not make the cross of mental illness, but it is still his to bear. As his sister, it is mine to bear too. By bearing the cross of mental illness and carrying it, we can move it—not rid ourselves of it or deny it—to a place of transformation like Golgotha. On that hill the cross became something not to be despised but a thing to transform the world. The Christian witness of the cross of Jesus; death transforms this instrument of torture. Instead of only being the instrument that killed Jesus, the cross became a symbol of the power of God to overcome the sins of the world. In the resurrection, God shows us that what is broken by this world can be made whole again.

How can a cross of mental illness be transformed into a symbol of God's power to heal us? I believe that by telling our stories of mental illness, by giving our own testimonies for mental health, we carry our crosses to more healing places, even places of transformation" (p. 51-52).

The Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Mary's poem:

And In The Stars by Mary Homer [03.02.2018]

Having mental illnesses can be scabs in the sky,
Thrusting comets bursting from afar.
And in the enfolding echoes of time
Are the star clusters
Refracting the troubled minds.

And yet to Andromeda, with its gaseous clouds,
Tumultuous souls jettison while flaying out loud.
Away from the deadly silences of the infinite kind,
They seek quasars and pulsars in desperate attempts
To quiet their minds.

Changing Attitudes

Session 4 [March 11]

Welcome to this safe space. Series leader shares the primary goal of creating and nurturing a safe space (e.g., non-judgmental, confidentially secure unless permission is given to share more widely) for sharing our stories in ways that change popularly held attitudes toward mental illness. It's through changed attitudes that we find healing. Through the discussion we can bring our congregation further into the process of becoming WISE [show on screen or poster] [2 min].

Introduce ourselves if there are first time participants [2 min].

Prayer (Pastor or another participant)

Today's Focus Question: Where and how do we express God's love for *all* God's children?

Lead-in activity: Last session, Mary shared her phenomenal poem, and then we found healing thoughts about how what is broken can be made whole again in the poem by Rumi, "The Guest House." Today we shift our focus a bit to explore what that means for someone on death row, someone that society--the collective--has thrown away. And together, may we try to discern what it means to **really** love all God's children as God loves us.

To begin, when you hear or read the word "JUSTICE," what images come to mind? Sketch or write or mentally note! [2-3 min] [Report out as comfortable, and chart.]

Today we'll read a tragic story of abuse, imprisonment, and execution that will help us consider the meaning of another kind of justice, "restorative justice," in which both the innocent and the guilty are candidates for redemption.

Short Read and Respond:

[Lund, p 69-71] Read this passage. Then talk with one other about what resonates with you, or what questions you may have. [10 min] [Report out as comfortable.]

Concluding thought: [Lund, p. 71] "If we are saved, it is only through God's resurrection, grace and willingness to renew and restore creation. The resurrection is radically inclusive, offering new life to all, not just to some. We don't get to choose who gets to be saved."

How might we enact "restorative justice" in our own lives and in our community? This is an important part of a mental health ministry too.

Close with Prayer: "Lord, forgive us, for we do not know what we do. [Blessed are the imprisoned,] blessed are the executed, for they will see God" [Lund, p. 71]

Next Session's Focus Q: How do we care for the care-givers and families of persons with mental illness?

Blessed are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence About Mental Illness, Family, and Church by Sarah Griffith Lund (2017).

Summary of the Back Story: Sarah Griffith Lund had a cousin, Paul, who experienced severe physical and sexual abuse during his first 3 years of life. The state removed him from that abusive home and placed him and his sibs into foster care that was hell on earth. An aunt rescued them through adoption. Paul never recovered from his early trauma, frequently experiencing hyperactivity. The aunt disciplined severely, often withholding food and baths. In his teens, Paul began to display signs of sexual addiction. After incidences with pornography, the aunt locked Paul to his bed with a heavy dog chain, and then later locked him in a wooden box the size of a steamer trunk. In her misguided attempts to cure his 'dirty fingers,' she pinched them with pliers. Seemingly out of control, at age 14 Paul was sent to a local boy's home. Six years later, Paul was convicted of a brutal rape and murder, and he was handed a death sentence.

"About a year and a half after Paul's execution...I began having flashbacks and nightmares about the execution. During a session with my spiritual director I said that the execution was a traumatically transformative experience in my life, but beyond that I could not articulate how it had changed me. My symptoms were the same as the post-traumatic stress disorder common among people in combat zones.

To sort through these thoughts and feelings, I began working as a chaplain in a local women's prison. I'd done what I could about the death penalty for the time being by testifying, writing, and preaching about it. Slowly my heart and mind were healing. Now I could struggle with the tension between prison as a place of punishment and as a place of healing...

What was the role of faith in helping the prisoners to heal and overcome the obstacles to their independence? As their chaplain, I felt like the most I could do for them was to listen to their stories and hear their own testimonies of faith...

One of the inmates always insisted on praying for me. Allowing her to do this took me to a disorienting place, as though hearing the ravings in that Pentecost gathering when the Holy Spirit broke into the room with rushing wind, tongues of fire, and a babble of languages. In that odd place I found the courage to once again ask the question: Where is God in the prison? The inmates taught me to see that God is in the

guilty ones, the sinners, the outcasts, and the ones that society rejects and throws away.

As a Christian, I want so badly to believe that God has the power to save us. But what life has taught me is that God cannot save us from situations where we choose to give fear and hatred power, and, in so doing, choose other gods. When we choose the God of love, whose very nature is to reconcile all things, then we have a real shot at saving the world through Christ. Salvation means wholeness and it comes through relationships, not through individual piety. While shopping for groceries during Holy Session, I returned to my car and found a 'ticket to heaven' tucked under my windshield wiper. It was a piece of white paper with instruction for what to believe in order to get to heaven. The problem with this logic is that it lets us off the hook because it doesn't require enough of us. God asks us to do more than simply believe. God asks us to follow the way of reconciliation, justice, and love. Too many Christians claim to be saved, yet in their support of capital punishment, they follow the way of vengeance, denying the God of love.

It is time for Christians to acknowledge that every time we execute a human being created in the image of God, we crucify God. Paul was a child of God, a person in pain, suffering from mental illness, desperately longing for wholeness and salvation. In response to his cries for help...we executed him. In response to Paul's violent acts, we acted violently to end his life. Violence, in whatever form it takes, carried out by individuals or society, cuts deeply into the human heart and blood that is spilled seeps into the depths of the Earth's soil, becoming part of everything; the cycle of violence is never ending.

As a Christian minister who celebrates the sacrament of communion, and in light of my life experiences with victims of violence, it's become more difficult to swallow 'the blood of Christ shed for me.' Instead, I receive and offer to others 'Christ's cup of love' as an affirmation of God's desire for all of creating to be made whole in love [p 69-71].

Changing Attitudes

Session 5 [March 18]

Welcome to this safe space. Series leader shares the primary goal of creating and nurturing a safe space (e.g., non-judgmental, confidentially secure unless permission is given to share more widely) for sharing our stories in ways that change popularly held attitudes toward mental illness. It's through changed attitudes that we find healing. Through the discussion we can bring our congregation further into the process of becoming WISE [show on screen or poster] [2 min].

Introduce ourselves if there are first time participants [2 min].

Prayer (Pastor or another participant)

Today's Focus Questions: **1)** Where and how do we express God's love for *all* God's children? and **2)** How do we care for the families of persons with mental illness?

Lead-in activity: Last Ssession we began to consider how what is broken can be made whole again, and we explored what that means for someone on death row, someone society has thrown away.

Recap the comments about justice from last session's session. Add any further thoughts. [2-3 min]

Today's read and respond affirms our comments and articulates 'restorative justice,' an alternative to justice as punishment.

Read and Respond I:

[Lund, p 66-67] Read this passage. Then talk with one other about what resonates with you, or what questions you may have. [10 min] [Report out as comfortable.]

Read and Respond II:

[Lund, excerpts from Chapter 6] Read and talk with one other about what resonates with you, or what questions you may have. [10 min] [Report out as comfortable.]

Concluding thought: [Lund, p 92-93] In 1990, First Lady Rosalyn Carter wrote, "People with mental problems are our neighbors. They are members of our congregations, members of our families; they are everywhere in this country. If we ignore their cries for help, we will be continuing to participate n the anguish from which those cries for help come. A problem of this magnitude will not go away. Because it will not go away, and because of our spiritual commitments, we are compelled to take action.

Close with Prayer: Lord, may we commit to **not** participate in the anguish of those crying for help, but to become "a community of truth tellers, decreasing stigma as we create safe, welcoming spaces for people with mental illness" [Lund, p. 102] and their families. Amen.

Next Session's Focus Q: What are W.I.S.E. congregations and do we want to become one? will not go away. Because it will not go away, and because of our spiritual commitments, we are compelled to take action.

Blessed are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence About Mental Illness, Family, and Church by Sarah Griffith Lund (2017).

"There was nothing I could have done to help Paul. I was powerless to save his life. It turns out that God couldn't really save his life, either. The great machine of the criminal justice system did what we created it to do, but this did not, I believe, serve the purpose of God's law. God's law restores. God's justice gives life. The family of Paul's murder victim was interviewed about the execution on the evening news. [The victim's] husband said, 'It didn't bring back my wife. I am still going to go home tonight and she is not going to be there.'

[The victim's] family was let down by the state and the promised redemption that was to come from the execution of the killer. Paul's death did not restore life to anyone.... The only successful outcome of the retributive justice model of capital punishment is just that--punishment.... **Restorative justice** is an alternative model becoming more popular throughout the USA. It strives to address the necessity of healing for not only the victims, but the criminal as well. Restorative justice is a global movement intended to balance the needs of both victims and offenders by reconciling relationships...It is an inclusive model of justice that views both the innocent and the guilty as candidates for redemption. The model closely follows Jesus' teachings to love our enemies and travel the long, difficult, but humanizing and liberating road to reconciliation. Restorative justice is the best hope for a society that is committed to ending the cycle of violence" (Lund, p 66-67).

Blessed are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence About Mental Illness, Family, and Church
[Lund, 2014].

Excerpts from Chapter 6

"Because the stigma attached to mental illness remains so powerful, there is little public recognition of the need to show compassion to people with mental illness, let alone for their caregivers and family members."

Kathleen Sebelius, US secretary of Health and Human Services (Carter Symposium on Mental Health, 2013) said our biggest challenge is not with scientific research for a cure or better meds to handle symptoms. "...the hardest part is to change people's attitudes about mental illness... Carter says it is "not a challenge of the head, but of the heart".

"So how do we go about making it okay for people with a mental health disease and their caregivers to speak out?"

Changing Attitudes

Session 6 [March 25]

Welcome to this safe space. Series leader shares the primary goal of creating and nurturing a safe space (e.g., non-judgmental, confidentially secure unless permission is given to share more widely) for sharing our stories in ways that change popularly held attitudes toward mental illness. It's through changed attitudes that we find healing. Through the discussion we can bring our congregation further into the process of becoming WISE [show on screen or poster] [2 min].

Introduce ourselves if there are first time participants [2 min].

Prayer (Pastor or another participant)

Series Recap: Distribute and emphasize the focus of these sessions was ever and always about a theological response to need.

"So how do we go about making it ok for people with a mental health dis-ease and their caregivers to speak out?" [Lund, p. 93]

W.I.S.E. Congregations: Opportunities for Action

Distribute brochures and direct attention to the "Who We Are" panel and the mission, vision, and values in the next panel. Then focus on the 10 steps panel. Talk with others (if the group is large) or just whole group if numbers are small. Note the Mental Health Network website.

Distribute conference information. Extend a challenge--Could we have a group of 5 or more attend and then, acting as our W.I.S.E. team, lead our congregation through the process?

Also, May 20 is Mental Health Sunday. Would any of you like to participate in planning?

Concluding thought: "As a faith community you are in a unique position to offer kinship, prayers, support, welcome and inclusion to those who often find themselves on the periphery of society" [MHN brochure].

Close with Prayer: Lord, bless all those who have gathered these past Sessions to grow deeper in understanding, in empathy, and in commitment to those who experience mental illness and their families. May we answer your call to become a truly W.I.S.E. congregation. In your name we pray. AMEN!

Series Recap

Telling our stories about the role mental illness plays or has played in our lives,

In **safe spaces**,

Promotes **healing**, even **transformation**,

And can bring us to live out **restorative justice**--for victims, for criminals, even for our society.

"**God's love for all God's children**" was embedded in each of these sessions,

and it is the foundation of **caring** for persons with mental illness and their families.