

Pastoral Approaches to Mental Illness in the Congregation

Syllabus

Instructor Information

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Course Description

Mental illness causes a great deal of suffering and anxiety for both individuals who are afflicted and their family members. It can also create confusion and fear for the larger community. Given how common mental illness is, pastors routinely encounter concerns for which their theological training may not have equipped them to respond. This course is designed to familiarize pastoral caregivers with the basic forms of mental illness, to consider theological and practical questions raised by these conditions, and to strengthen appropriate assessment, triage and referral skills. The course has been designed with clergy in active parish ministry in mind, though all who provide pastoral care in any form are welcome.

Goals and Objectives:

The goals of this course are:

- 1) To increase understanding of both mental wellness and the various forms of mental illness encountered in congregations
- 2) To increase confidence in one's ability to respond appropriately to issues of mental illness
- 3) To consider theological questions raised by mental illness and equip pastors to respond
- 4) To educate pastoral caregivers about systems of care for the mentally ill and their families, and how to work with those systems to access appropriate care for their congregants
- 5) To improve pastoral care to the mentally ill and their families

Learning Objectives of this Course:

- 1) To educate and increase awareness about the level of suffering and the needs of the mentally ill and their families
- 2) Equip pastors and other pastoral caregivers to speak about and respond constructively to issues of mental illness within the congregation
- 3) To elucidate the gospel character of the church as a place for people to encounter healing
- 4) To equip pastors to lead their congregations in accepting and incorporating the mentally ill and their families into the life of the community.

Learning Objectives at Trinity School for Ministry:

- 1) The student will recognize and identify the biblical theology evident in the course work.
- 2) The student will be able to articulate an Anglican understanding of biblical, historical, systematic, and pastoral theology.
- 3) The student will be able to effectively communicate the Christian message to a diversity of people in order to advance the mission of God.
- 4) (MDiv) The student will be prepared to effectively lead in a variety of Christian communities.
(MAR) The student will be equipped to apply scholarship to the life of the church in his or her chosen theological discipline.
(DMin) The student will be equipped to successfully pursue further independent research and post-graduate study in his or her chosen theological discipline.

Participant Responsibilities

1. Read the assigned materials and participate in class/group discussions in a manner that demonstrates familiarity and engagement with them.
2. Book review of *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. No more than 2 pages double spaced (Times Rm 11 or 12pt font), due Wednesday, January xx. Outline/ summarize Scazzero's overall argument, then respond. What are the strength and weaknesses of his premise? Would you recommend this book to someone else (why or why not)?
3. Consider how mental illness has touched your own life and/or ministry. Write a 3-4 page reflection on your experience, including what you have learned and questions you may still have (Due Wednesday, January xx).
Some may wish to debrief and reflect on a particular pastoral scenario they have encountered in light of the material presented in the class. In such situations, a case study is an acceptable alternative to a personal reflection (4 pgs max). The format for a case study is as follows:
 - a. Briefly present the facts of the situation, being careful to safeguard identity and to be concise. (Example: "One of our members with bipolar disorder served as a youth group volunteer for three years before having to be hospitalized for a manic episode. We weren't sure what to tell the teens, and the Youth Minister was hesitant about having M. continue to volunteer")
 - b. Describe and reflect on your response at the time. (What were your thoughts/ questions? What did you do? What went well? What did not go well? How did you feel about your response at the time?)
 - c. What was it about this situation that most affected you? (What caused you to select it for the case study? Does any part of it still feel "open"?)
 - d. Engage with class materials to reflect on the situation from where you are now. How do you feel about your response now? (Is there anything you wish you had known? What would you like to do in the future? What questions do you still have?)
4. Select one of the mental health conditions covered in class. Using the readings and materials from class sessions, write an essay discussing the practical and theological challenges that condition presents to the individual afflicted, the family of that person, and the wider church community. How can the church community and the pastor offer hope and assistance to individuals with that disorder and to the challenges you identified? (8-10 pages, double spaced, Times Rm 11 or 12 pt font. Due Friday, xx).

Grading: Evaluation of assignments will follow Trinity's standard grading scale, adapted from the University of Durham.

Required Readings

Articles/ excerpts indicated throughout the syllabus are required and will be available on reserve in the library (Edvance360?). In addition, the following texts are required:

Govig, Stewart. *Souls are Made of Endurance: Surviving Mental Illness in the Family*. Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

Simpson, Amy. *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Additional Suggested Resources

Albers, Robert H., William H. Meller, and Steven D. Thurber, eds. *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and their Families*. Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2012.

Capp, Donald. *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching: A Quest for an Integrated Ministry*. Eugene, Ore: Wipf & Stock, 2003.

Carlson, Dwight L. Carlson. *Why Do Christians Shoot their Wounded? Helping (Not Hurting) Those with Emotional Difficulties*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Roukema, Richard W. *The Soul in Distress: What Every Pastoral Counselor Should Know about Emotional and Mental Illness*. London: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1997.

Monday

- Theological paradigms for understanding mental illness
- Overview of mental health disorders
- Reading: *Simpson*

Tuesday

- Theological paradigms for the care of the mentally ill
- Pastoral response to “front line” mental health disorders
- Working with counselors and mental health systems
- Medication considerations
- Case Study 1
- Reading: *Simpson*

Wednesday

- Pastoral response to trauma
- Stigma and shame as theological issues
- Case Study 2
- Pastoral response to personality disorders
- Mental illness and the demonic
- Reading: *Simpson*
Excerpt: “The Adversary.” From *Grace for the Afflicted*. Mark Stanford.

Thursday

- Case Study 3
- Children and mental illness
- The gospel character of the church as a place for healing
- Pastoral care for family members of the mentally ill
- Reading: Goving and Scazzero

Friday

- Pastoral response to addiction
- Helping the congregation understand the needs of the mentally ill
- Preaching about mental wellness/ illness
- Liturgical considerations
- Reading: TBD