

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

“Contribute to the needs of the saints, pursue hospitality ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other ... ” – Romans 12:13,15-16

Mental Health

Mental health is an idea that is often seen through the perspective of a disease model, which can potentially isolate a sufferer. While treating conditions medically is important, ancient and modern cultures recognize the importance of the context within which we live and its contribution to mental health. One of the themes from scripture that spans both the old and new testaments is the concept of community and the way that community promotes health.

There is a Hebrew word for this community context: *shalom*. Most people know *shalom* to mean “peace” but it has a much deeper meaning that relates to community. As anthropologist Peter Kroeker found, *shalom* is not merely an absence of civil disturbances but an active pursuit of the well being of others. It finds its expression in a sharing and caring community. It involves compassion for the needs of others. It is felt in the way we greet one another (and strangers) in our own Bethany community.

This summer, while Jean and I were vacationing in God’s beautiful Colorado mountains, we met the pastor of a small community church in our area. He invited us to join them on a Wednesday evening for bible study at a local warehouse, since their church building had not yet been built. I was struck by the relationships between the congregants we met at that bible study. Like the communities that Paul was writing to in Romans, this was a small congregation of people who are forming a new church. The strength of their community is in their shared beliefs, but it is also in their willingness to feed one another, help a new member with moving their household, and above all in the way they greeted one another and us when they assembled – like people who really care for each other.

As with other aspects of health, mental health does not start with disease, with caring for someone who is suffering from depression, anxiety, or other psychiatric conditions. At its core, it starts with the foundation of relationships within which each of us lives. Living within a community of caring promotes mental health. And shaping a community of health is something in which we each can take an active role; often just by the way we behave toward one another. Indeed, the ELCA motto, “God’s Work, Our Hands” reminds us that it is through us that the Holy Spirit works on earth.

The ELCA Social Statement, *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor*, puts it this way: “We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have an enduring commitment to work for and support health care for all people as a shared endeavor. Our commitment comes in grateful response to God's saving love in Jesus Christ that frees us to love and seek the wellbeing of our neighbor. When we understand health in this larger context, we realize that we cannot be healthy by ourselves. We help each other attain good health through our ways of living together ...” *Shalom*. - JL

If you have ideas to share with us or are interested in the work of the Health and Wellness Cabinet, please contact Anne Gatzke: littlezookie@yahoo.com.