We Will Hold Onto You: The Liberating Power of Music and Liturgy to Break Open the Stories of Mental Illness in Communities of Faith

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WE WILL HOLD ONTO YOU: THE LIBERATING POWER OF MUSIC AND LITURGY TO BREAK OPEN THE STORIES OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

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WE WILL HOLD ONTO YOU: THE LIBERATING POWER OF MUSIC AND LITURGY TO
BREAK OPEN THE STORIES OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
Perkins School of Theology
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in
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for the degree of
Doctor of Pastoral Music
by
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ABSTRACT

One in five people lives with a diagnosable mental health problem in any given year. Thus, the presence of mental illness already permeates faith communities. The church’s history with mental illness remains complicated, especially as some communities of faith continue to espouse negative lay theologies that are harmful and dismissive to people living with mental health problems. Guided by the tenants of liberation theology, this thesis argues that mental health justice is a part of God’s overarching justice intended for all creation. When we, as God’s people, encounter or observe injustice, it is our theological task to gather the weary, the oppressed, and the marginalized and bring them back to their seat at the table of God’s grace where God calls them by name: beloved.

This document proposes that pastoral musicians, clergy, and others charged with planning and facilitating worship are essential to developing a theology of mental health that welcomes and accepts all people into the family of God, regardless of physical or mental, or emotional disability. Within communities of faith, engagement with such a task begins within the context of worship, for the musical and liturgical choices we make as pastoral musicians shapes our community’s understanding of the Body of Christ in all its wonder and diversity. Therefore, when people with mental health challenges see and hear themselves and their lived realities of mental illness represented in the musical and liturgical landscape of their faith community, they are liberated from destructive stigmas and can break the chains of prejudice, stereotypes, and injustice.
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Just before Christmas 2014, I feared for my life at my own hands. Amid this crisis, I was somehow granted the mindfulness to check myself into a local psychiatric hospital where I stayed for four days. I discovered how humiliating and dehumanizing the admittance process into a psychiatric facility can be. Because so many of these facilities are full or over capacity, patients are held in the waiting area while it is confirmed that there is a bed available. Your loved ones are not allowed to stay with you through the intake process; you are quickly separated and led back to another room where you answer additional questions and sign papers. Then, they take your belongings: the bag or purse you came in with, your keys, your clothes, your cell phone—anything that connects you to the outside world is removed and stored away in a locker to which you have no access. Before you are given a pair of complimentary hospital scrubs, you are intimately searched. In another small, windowless room, you are instructed to undress down to your underwear. Just when you think you could not feel any more vulnerable, a gloved stranger runs her hands along your bra line, taking special care to make sure you have not hidden anything in your underwire. After it is confirmed that you are not in possession of any drugs or weapons, you are instructed to put on your scrubs and join the rest of the patients in the front gathering room.

From this moment forward, your every move is watched and recorded: How much did you eat in a given day? Did you drink any water? Are you sleeping? Not sleeping? Are you actively participating in group therapy? What TV shows are you watching? Who are you interacting with? Are you writing in your journal? Do you stare out the window a little too often?
Phone use is limited. You cannot even take a shower without supervision, and if you want to shave, you are given a disposable razor to use while someone watches you use it. The nurse stationed at the front desk does not even raise her eyes to look at you when you inquire when you might be going home. Like a broken record, she responds with, “You’ll have to ask your doctor.” Outside visits from family and other loved ones are supervised and strictly offered for two hours each evening—unless you are a clergyperson, who is allowed to visit during daytime hours.

One afternoon as I was lying in bed, a nurse informed me I had a visitor. Quite unexpectedly, my pastor came to visit me in the hospital. I was immediately mortified; not only was my pastor my minister, he was also my boss. It was only a year and half ago that I was hired to serve Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend as the Director of Music Ministries—what would he think of his recently-hired music director after seeing her in a psychiatric hospital? As I emerged from my room and followed the nurse into the visitors’ area, my head began to spin with fear and anxiety. I sheepishly greeted my pastor as we took our seats across from each other in a small room with no windows. Dressed in oversized hospital scrubs and bright yellow socks with white grippers on the soles, I felt something between terror and comfort. Once we were situated, he looked into my eyes and asked me what had happened; how I thought I had gotten here. He listened to me as, through tears, I attempted to choke through the events of the last few days. He sat quietly; never speaking and never interrupting. Before he left, he prayed with me.

**The LORD Has Done Great Things for Me, and I Am Glad Indeed**

I do not remember what we talked about or prayed about that afternoon. What I do remember is how he made me feel when I was able to return to work: he treated me with the same dignity and
respect that he had treated me with before I entered the hospital. Despite my fears of judgment and rejection, my pastor continued to regard me as a valued member of the staff, even after having seen me in the midst one of the darkest moments of my life. I was released on a Saturday afternoon. The following Sunday morning, as I continued to recover at home, I received an email from him:

“Hillary, as you continue to recover, the Psalm for today seemed very timely:

1When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream.
2Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.
   Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”
3The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. Ps. 126:1-3 (NRSV).

Glad to know you are feeling better and though you will be missed this morning, you will be with us through your psalm tune and the preparations you have done with musicians.”

Not only had my pastor come to see me in the hospital, but he saw me in the liturgy that morning in the words of Psalm 126. I felt remembered and validated; like my pain meant something to someone else. The very act of remembering another person’s plight is a powerful part of our understanding of how communities of faith relate to their people pastorally. 2 God knows and holds each of us in his memory; it is the ministry of Christian communities to hear and remember those with whom we minister. 3 I spent the next several days recuperating at home, and while I could not participate in worship that weekend, I sensed that my faith community was with me in prayer and in spirit. I will never forget how much that meant to me, and I did not

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1 Steve Schwier, ‘psalm,’ email, 2014.
2 John Swinton, Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the Care of People with Mental Health Problems (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 123.
know at the time how much this experience would change my overall approach to music ministry.

Several weeks after my hospitalization, I continued to reel in the many complex emotions that one encounters after such an experience. I was embarrassed at how my life had spun out of control, ashamed of what I had put my spouse and immediate family through, and worried about how I would explain my sudden absence to friends and colleagues. The most painful feelings of all were the destructive lies my compromised brain fed to me about how God must be so disappointed in me for what I had tried to do to myself; for coming incredibly close to ending the life that had been given to me as a gift of grace. Over time, through regular counseling sessions, appointments with my psychiatrist, and the support and kindness of others, I slowly began to pick up the pieces of my life.

The Winding Road Toward Recovery

The days I spent at my local psychiatric hospital kept me alive, but it was not a life-giving experience. Many more months of healing were in front of me, and my community of faith, including my pastor, played a large role in that process. As my journey into recovery continued, I began to understand the woman that wanted to die that mid-December afternoon in 2014 was not a terrible person. She was sick and suffering, convinced she no longer deserved a place in the world or in the heart of God. Though that woman is undeniably a part of my past and therefore, is a part of me, she is not all of me. Regardless of her past, she is a beloved child of her Creator. My community of faith played a significant role in helping me remember this. My now-retired pastor, my mentor, and my friend, Steve Schwier, showed me a new way for the church to be the
church through his utmost care for my personhood, genuine concern for my wellbeing, and the faith he had in me when I was too ill to believe in myself.

Likewise, as I began to share the story of my mental health challenges with other people in the congregation, my community of faith responded with the same kind of care and support. The people of Christ the King Lutheran Church found ways to love me when I deemed myself unlovable. They reminded me that my life is not defined by my illness and gave me permission to talk about my experiences in a safe place—free from judgment and bias. They did not shudder or turn away when I risked revealing sides of myself that had been scarred by my depression. And then, one day, in all her wisdom, the church said to me: now go and do for others what has been done for you.

Figure 1.1 Christ the King Lutheran Church of South Bend, Indiana. Photo: Adam Raschka.
The Birth of Christ the King’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope

I had an opportunity to do just that the year Samaritan Counseling Center celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Samaritan Counseling Center (now known as Seasons Counseling of Michiana) is a local provider of professional mental health services that is located on our church campus. It was established by one of the church’s former pastors in 1974 and has been a source of help, hope, and healing for many individuals and families in the community ever since. One afternoon in a weekly staff meeting in early 2014, Pastor Steve asked me if I had any ideas regarding how the church might help the Samaritan Center observe its fortieth year and honor its founder, Pastor Keith Munneke. I sat quietly for a moment before expressing the first idea that came to mind: “What about a hymn festival?”

In 2019, Christ the King Lutheran Church observed its sixth annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope—the last hymn festival we were able to offer before the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. In any given “normal” year, the Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is always scheduled on the first Friday evening of every October as a kick-off to National Mental Illness Awareness Week. It is an evening where people of all walks of life gather for congregational singing, intercessory prayers, humbling testimonies, pastoral anointing for healing, and spirited performances by local choral groups, including several of Christ the King’s musical ensembles. The Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope symbolizes something different to each person in attendance, but what I hope is communicated to the gathered assembly and performers alike throughout the evening is that the church can be a place of compassion, solidarity, and healing for people living with mental health challenges; a place where people can ask the difficult questions, share their brokenness with others, and find dignity in their stories that have been fractured by the realities of living with mental illness.
While this is what my church was able to do for me as I walked the road of recovery from my hospitalization, I realize that not everyone’s experience of mental illness within the church is as comforting or life-giving. For many people, the church’s response to mental illness and those who live with it is truly damaging and destructive. I understand that while I cannot change the complicated history between the church and people with mental health challenges, nor can I insist that individual churches begin to reconsider their theologies surrounding this topic, I can examine and work to reframe the theologies of disability and psychiatric disorder and how they intersect with the music and liturgy of my own congregation. I can also share with other pastoral musicians, pastors, and worship leaders the lessons I have learned and the resources I have found useful in this quest with people in other communities whose task it is to plan and prepare worship.

**Personal Mental Health Advocacy**

While I am a fierce advocate for mental health and the people with these conditions, I am in no way a mental health professional. I do not have a license to practice or provide therapy or prescribe medication. This thesis does not intend to offer any kind of medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment plan. I am, however, a pastoral musician living with diagnosed mood and anxiety disorders. My lived experience with mental illness informs my theological understanding of the church’s mission and influences the musical and liturgical choices I make within the boundaries of my vocation as a pastoral musician.

About two years after my hospitalization, I began to consider a career change. I thought about all the people in my life who helped me through my mental health crisis and found myself wanting to provide that kind of support for others. My passion for mental health advocacy grew
so significantly I contemplated leaving music ministry to be able to serve others in a more pastoral, perhaps even clinical setting. I researched various pastoral counseling degree programs, including online programs of study as well as programs that would require me to commute to a seminary in another nearby city such as Chicago. The thought of learning how to help people manage their mental health challenges in a more clinical setting was exciting to me, however, I also began to lament that this would likely mean I could no longer serve my community of faith as their pastoral musician.

One morning, as I was perusing social media, an advertisement for a new degree program through the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University caught my attention. This program was called the Doctor of Pastoral Music, or DPM. After reading further about the DPM, I decided to contact Dr. Michael Hawn, the founder of the DPM program and longtime director of the Master of Sacred Music program at the Perkins School of Theology. After taking some prerequisite courses in Bible and liturgy at the nearby University of Notre Dame and completing the application process, I began my first semester as a DPM student in the summer of 2017.

The Birth of a Community Mental Health Ministry

During my studies at Perkins School of Theology, I continued to serve Christ the King Lutheran Church, where I began to develop a community ministry of mental health alongside my colleagues and partners in ministry, sensing this was where my vocation was calling me. The Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope became a large part of that overall ministry. When we initially offered the Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope in 2014, we did not anticipate that it would become an important, meaningful evening of mental health advocacy and
awareness in the life of our congregation and community. The response to the first festival was so enthusiastic that we then began to plan for it every early October. Over the months that followed, I began to hear stories—sometimes directly from other people and other times from second-hand sources—about how much this festival meant to others and how touched they were that a local community of faith would devote an entire evening to recognize the presence of mental illness in the community, the individuals that live with these diagnoses, and the people that love them.

At one point, in preparation for the writing of this thesis, I asked participants in the music ministry at Christ the King, many of them also participants in the Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope, why music and liturgy are important to them, especially as a method to address mental illness as a gathered community of Christ:

“I am proud that Christ the King embraces those that are grieving and dealing with mental health challenges. It is courageous, and by incorporating these topics in worship my faith is more real, less abstract.”

– Bill

“The Hymn Festival of healing and Hope has always fed my soul with its music. But it became intensely personal for me when I walked up with my youngest for a laying on of hands. My daughter had just begun her mental health struggle.”

– Cicely

“Upon reflection, it surprises me a bit to realize a stand-out in my mind is Hymnfest. The participation of so many groups and individuals over the years along with the attendance show how important mental health issues and dealing with personal crises (grief, addiction, among others) are. I feel glad to be a part of something that unique and necessary.”

– Nena

“I believe that God wants us to encompass all manner of people and to make them accepted for who they are as a person of faith…people need to know that as a congregation we suffer with them and want to surround them with love.”

– Michele
“It means everything. It means we are real and open about life. It means people are welcome to come and share their true selves and be loved. To be a part of an empathetic congregation makes me proud.”

–Jill

“Music and worship make clear the strong message that all are welcome. We all have struggles at times and church is where we find hope, help, and understanding.”

–Cookie

“I’ve known for many years that the “church” wasn’t just a Sunday service. And the Bible mentions pain, questioning, doubts, fears, and grief. But little has been done to tie mental illness to these services. Now those words are spoken openly in our church. It helps me to realize that Christ is present in our lives regardless of our state of mind.”

–Anonymous

“[Music and worship] each provide opportunities for fellowship, participation, and for spiritual and intellectual growth…Worship and music collectively can provide reminders that mental health issues, among other things, do not exclude one from participating. I find that participating is very therapeutic.”

–Doug

“Maybe some Christians have no diagnosed mental illness, but even then, they have the same feelings at times. Any church not addressing these needs of humans cannot be a church… Personally, I cannot be a part of a church that doesn’t acknowledge our human need for a God who is personal to help us.”

–Lorrie

After many more conversations and interactions with people about what it means to them to attend a church with a thriving mental health ministry, it occurred to me that this subject deserved more attention than just one evening a year. As I began to read more about community mental health ministry and different theologies of mental health in preparation for writing this thesis, with help from my pastors and from Seasons Counseling, Christ the King began to find other ways to integrate topics of mental health into the worship life of our community. It is through these kinds of collaborations that Christ the King now enjoys a thriving and developing ministry of mental health that includes not just the continuation of the Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope, but also Mental Health Awareness Sundays, the creation of a Mental Health Ministries Team, the addition of a Community Mental Health Ministries Consultant who helps us
plan and execute mental health workshops, among other activities, and a weekly support group for people living with mental illness and their loved ones.

**Nomenclature: Language That Speaks Truthfully to the Experience of Mental Illness**

If a mental health ministry was going to survive and thrive at Christ the King, we as a community of faith needed to develop ways to address mental illness that were inviting and inclusive, but also honest and transparent. People with mental health problems are marginalized and misunderstood in part because the societal stigmas and cultural assumptions about mental illness are underrepresented or misrepresented. The mystery that enshrouds mental illness is often a source of fear and trepidation instead of curiosity and compassion for those who are not familiar with these conditions. To break down the barriers between people who live with mental illness and those who do not, we must commit to write, speak, and sing about mental illness in ways that are life-giving and empowering, using terminology that tells the truth about the experience of what means to live with a mental health diagnosis. Utilizing such intentional language allows us to co-create an environment in our communities, including communities of faith, where the stories of people living with mental illness are shared, heard, and honored as part of the overall story of what it means to be human.

This thesis applies several interchangeable terms for mental illness, including mental health challenges, mental health problems, and mental health disorders. It is important to note that these terms in no way suggest that the people living with these diagnoses are in any way challenging, problematic, or disordered. They only refer to the diagnosable medical conditions that encompass mental illness. Therefore, this document will utilize “person first” language when discussing the people behind these diagnoses. For example, instead of saying, “he is
schizophrenic,” we say, “he is a person with schizophrenia.” Similarly, when referring to someone’s depression, we say, “she is a person struggling with depression,” instead of she is a “depressed person.” These seemingly small changes to how we talk about mental illness is one way in which we can begin to change our attitudes about this topic. At the heart of this effort is the belief that people with mental health problems are not their diagnoses; they are human beings.

It is in the spirit of honesty and transparency that this thesis addresses the topics of suicide and suicidal ideation. The experience of these topics is a realistic part of the experience of mental illness and will therefore be included throughout this document. The ways in which we address topics of suicide has also changed over the last several years. When a person loses his or her battle with mental illness, it is now discouraged to say, “she committed suicide.” This language suggests that a person’s decision to end their life by “committing” suicide is somehow an act of criminality. Instead, mental health professionals and advocates encourage us to use phrases such as, “she died by suicide,” or even, “she suicided.”

Despite one’s personal opinions about suicide, including theological opinions long held by some communities of faith, the reality is that sometimes, people lose their life to their mental illness just as someone loses their life to terminal cancer or heart failure. While there are still many individuals and faith communities that regard suicide as a sin, this thesis affirms that people who experience suicidal thinking or even die by suicide are loved by God and are covered by God’s mercy and grace in the midst or even at the conclusion of their suffering.4 This paper

4 Note: In 2019, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposed 988 as the three-digit number for suicide prevention and mental health crisis. As of July 16, 2022, anyone in the United States can call or text 988 to access live help during times of crises. As stated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (SAMHSA) the agency responsible for bringing the 988 crisis hotline to fruition, this program is a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to strengthen and expand the Lifeline and transform America’s behavioral health crisis care system to one that saves lives by serving anyone, at any time, from anywhere across the nation.” (See: Substance
proposes that there is little medical distinction between physical and mental (or emotional)
ailments; mental illnesses are diagnosable, treatable medical conditions from which people can
live and thrive in recovery or remission.

A Thesis Overview

People living with mental health disorders and their loved ones are beloved children of God and
belong in the Family of God. They are our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors, they
are people created in the very image of God just like you and me. Unfortunately, the general,
wider regard and treatment of people with mental health problems remains a contentious
theological issue. Some communities of faith interpret the presence of mental illness in Christian
contexts as antithetical to their Christian beliefs, yet according to St. Paul and his vision for the
Christian church—the Body of Christ—people with mental illness are very much an essential
component of the Christian life that we all participate and dwell in together. In his first letter to
the church in Corinth, St. Paul writes:

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say,
"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a
part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to
the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an
eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense
of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as
he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are
many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you.,"
or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the members of
the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that
we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members
are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need
this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior
member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), “988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline,”
the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.\textsuperscript{5}

Nothing that God creates is indispensable but works for the common good of the whole gathered community. The depth of our diversity as human beings illustrates the bottomless creativity of the one who created each of us in his likeness. The absence or hiddenness of people with mental illness in our communities of faith is therefore an open wound in the Body of Christ. It is a painful wound that needs our theological attention and our communal care.

I have experienced firsthand what it means to be upheld and empowered by a community of faith. The people of Christ the King loved me back into being after some harrowing experiences of depressive episodes, heightened periods of anxiety, and yes, even a brief stay at a psychiatric facility. My pastors and my congregation reacted to my suffering in ways that embodied the love and grace of God. Their actions helped me remember who I am, whose I am, and thus liberated me to return to the work that God calls me to do in community with others.

Based on my experience as a person with a mental illness and as my experience as a pastoral musician, people with mental health challenges are liberated from destructive stigmas when they see themselves and the realities of their illness represented in the music and liturgy of their community of faith, even if that means we must reexamine, challenge, or even reframe our congregation’s musical and liturgical practices.

Chapter 2 lays the theological foundations upon which the remainder of this thesis will rest: liberation theology. A theology of mental health fits so well underneath the umbrella of liberation theology because this a theology that empowers people to take a stand and call out the injustices that keep their backs against the wall. Liberation theology, although it originates from places of great poverty and marginalization, also calls communities of faith into action, whereby

\textsuperscript{5} 1 Corinthians 12:14–26 (NRSV).
through a process of reflection and praxis, the church learns to align itself with the poorest of the poor, standing in solidarity with the oppressed as they advocate for justice and equality in their communities. There are many ways for faith communities to engage in tasks that will foster understanding and solidarity between themselves and the “other,” which Chapter 2 will explore in further detail.

Also featured in Chapter 2 is the groundbreaking writing of disability advocate, Nancy Eiesland, which helps able-bodied and able-minded people to comprehend the challenges that physical, mental, or emotional disability poses to one’s life of faith. Eiesland advocates for the reframing of our conception of God to a God that is disabled, permanently marked with scars of suffering, which carries significant implications for people living with mental health problems, including those who self-harm. The reconceptualizing of disability as we understand it today sheds new light on Jesus’ lived experience with pain, suffering, and death as presented in the gospels. Marcia Webb’s research regarding negative attitudes and lay theologies brings the reader into a space of curiosity: what does a mental health ministry look like and how might a community of faith initiate such a ministry? Some of the steps outlined at the end of this chapter were essential to my congregation as we began our own journey toward creating a mental health ministry for our congregation and community alike.

Chapter 3 slightly narrows the theological lens in order to focus on the ministry of the pastoral musician as a conduit toward transformative liberation for people with mental health problems and their loved ones. I introduce the event that essentially helped launch Christ the King’s mental health ministry, our Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope. The church, which for many years was silent when it came to people living with mental health problems, can break open the truth about what it means to live with mental illness by encouraging stories of
mental illness to be shared, heard, and validated. This task extends a measure of mental health justice, a term written about at length by Sarah Lund, to a group of people who were for many years relegated to the shadows. Mental health justice is also stirred within a community of faith when a church’s congregational song is willing to tell the truth about mental illness through the hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs of that community. This is where the role of the pastoral musician comes into play as she begins to understand that her musical and liturgical choices matter deeply to the worshipping community, especially to those who have for too long been excluded from the song.

Chapter 4 is a study on the ancient Hebrew practice of lament and its importance in faith communities of today. Pastor and author, Abby Norman, advocates for congregations to openly lament together to bring the entirety of their human experience before God and one another. In the early church, worshippers heavily relied on the Psalms to express not only their fervent praise, adoration, and thanksgiving, but their intense sadness, anger, and pain. This chapter draws attention to Walter Brueggeman’s work regarding his classification of the psalms: psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. After working through examples of each, I present a personal narrative that incorporates Brueggeman’s concepts of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation as they are interpreted through the lived experience of someone with a mental illness. While lament is a healthy, Biblical practice, some Christian communities have turned their backs to corporate lamentation. We will hear from different theologians of today why the absence of lament creates a void in our lives of faith together, for to express our full, unedited experience of what it means to be human is to understand that God hears ours cries for healing and justice, not just for people living with mental illness, but for all people.
The final chapter addresses how a congregation’s musical and liturgical landscape shapes the ways we express our deepest emotions—our joys and our laments—as a Family of Faith. Chapter 5 is a collection of liturgies that I have created to address issues of mental illness and mental health into the worshipping life of our community of faith at Christ the King Lutheran Church. I discuss the Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope in detail, focusing not only on the music of the festival, but on other liturgical components that weave together themes of mental health justice, including storytelling, lamentation, and liberation. Additionally, I present other liturgies, including Mental Health Awareness Sunday, and a Blue Christmas worship service to help congregations address issues of mental illness, grief, and loss through communal song and prayer. All of these liturgies are available in their complete form in the Appendices section of this document.
CHAPTER 2:
MENTAL ILLNESS AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

“When you’re dealing with disease, the people who are suffering most from the community, you’ve got to listen about what it is they have to say about their experiences.”

–Dr. Anthony Fauci

Liberation Theology: A Theology of the People by the People

The origins of liberation theology were revolutionary—not because they flowed from the pens of renowned scholars and learned theologians—but because they arose from the oppressed cries of some of the world’s poorest peoples. The theology of liberation shines a light on marginalized peoples by inviting them out from under the weight of poverty so they may give voice to the gross injustices they have endured for generations. This is not a theology solely intended for academic discussion or debate; to engage with liberation theology in this setting would not fully convey its intended purpose. It is a dynamic theology that thrives in the streets, lives among struggling people in forgotten communities, advocates for access to basic human rights, and, perhaps most all, calls upon faith communities to do the same. Liberation theology is a radical invitation to faith communities to leave the safety and comfort of their long-held beliefs about what the church should be, so that, in standing beside the poor and adding its voice to their pleas for justice, it may discover all that it could be.

People living with mental health challenges are a part of these struggling and forgotten communities, but communities of faith have not always responded to their cries for equality, justice, and inclusion. Liberation theology, therefore, lays the foundation for our inquiry into a theology of mental health.

Liberation Theology and Gustavo Gutiérrez

Dominican priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928– ), wrote *A Theology of Liberation* (1971) and is considered a founder of the movement. His formative ideas emerged from his ministry with some of the poorest peoples of Latin America. As he observed members of these marginalized communities begin to develop a deeper awareness of their lowly position in Latin American society, he was convinced that existing theologies could not aptly respond to their cries for justice. Gutiérrez sensed that the church had entered a new era and needed a theology that would inform its ministry practices going forward. It was the oppressed peoples of Latin America, however, that would usher in new theological tasks for this time of change.\(^2\) As conditions evolved, people at the margins of society continued to grapple with a difficult realization: their oppressive living conditions were not compatible with what the church taught them about living a life of faith in Christ Jesus.\(^3\) How could a community of faith who claimed to follow the teachings of Jesus stand idly by when thousands of people were dying in poverty? Faith communities began to consider how they would react to the murmurs of the Spirit that were calling them to reinterpret the gospel message in light of this new chapter in its history.\(^4\)

Many institutions continue to explore innovative ways to address and fix the complex problems of the modern world. Faith communities are also realizing that these challenges are so intricately multi-dimensional in nature that no one approach will bring forth a resolution.\(^5\) The theological tasks set in motion by marginalized peoples in search of liberation continues to guide the church as it navigates both new and lasting challenges. Gutiérrez insists that the church


regularly engage in theological reflection as a means of examining and understanding its role in these challenges. Liberation theology, where faith and life are so tightly bound, helps the church discern a path toward mental health ministry that is loyal to both the gospel message and to the realities that people with mental health challenges experience.

**Reflection**

Theological reflection is the process by which Christians understand their faith in relation to the demands of the gospel. It is a critical, but thoughtful method that helps faith communities interpret and evaluate their theological practices in light their theological reflections within their individual ministry contexts. Thus, liberation theology is a contextual theology springing from the believers within a community of faith. With time and attention, one learns and develops the practice of critical reflection. These “coming of age” experiences indicate one’s journey toward mature personhood. Similar “coming of age” experiences mark the Christian life and deepen Christian consciousness.

As early as the 1950s and 60s, the impoverished peoples of Latin America began to develop a sense of agency that led to a conscientization of their status in society and in the church. As the commitment to their own destinies intensified, they began to organize, fighting for their rights to life, dignity, and social justice, thereby devoting themselves to the pursuit of their own liberation. In response to their outcries, Latin American churches began to engage in the practice of critical reflection to foster an awareness for the plight of the poor and other

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7 Gutiérrez and Müller, *On the Side of the Poor*, 16.
“nonpersons.” Through this process, the church began to understand its role in the historical transformation of the poor and oppressed peoples of Latin America. What followed was an overhaul of faith that fundamentally changed the concept of the Christian life. Their faith did not await the reign of God, but actively participated in the kind of kingdom-building work that brought God’s peace and justice to those that needed it most. The praxis of solidarity with poor and oppressed peoples reflects the method of liberation theology.

Liberation theology continues to provide insight into other areas of theological study and reflection. In the United States alone, it has offered fresh perspectives to Black, Womanist, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Feminist theologies. The application of liberation theology’s methodology by these varied constituencies illustrates its potential for developing theologies of disability and mental health. The development of an informed and compassionate theology of mental health will better prepare and equip faith communities to carry out informed and compassionate community mental health ministries. Gutiérrez addresses three dimensions of liberation as they apply to his ministry in the Latin American church: liberation from social oppression and marginalization, liberation from self, and liberation from sin, which he defines as the “breaking of friendship with God.” People with mental health challenges can identify with each of these dimensions of liberation.

The political and socio-economic structures that perpetuate inaccurate depictions of mental illness keep this community unseen, unheard, and underrepresented in mainstream society. These structures are often confusing for people with mental health challenges as they grow to understand that the conditions of their daily realities are “contrary to God’s will for their

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lives.” Despite their diagnoses, people with mental health challenges experience liberation when they break free from thought patterns and behaviors that impede them from personal transformation. While people with mental health challenges can experience liberation from their sin as much as anyone else, the mere presence of mental illness is not indicative of personal sin. Contrary to the church’s historical position on the subject, it is now more widely accepted that mental illness is a legitimate and treatable medical condition that does not exclude anyone from the unmerited and redemptive love of God.

For people struggling with mental illness, reflection upon these dimensions of liberation is means of hope and possibility. Theological reflection demands an interior review of the “escapist theologies” that contribute to the church’s questionable treatment of people with mental health problems. Such a task helps congregations begin to dismantle the harmful attitudes, outdated justifications, isolating stigmas, and destructive stereotypes that continue to keep people with mental health problems beyond reach of the church’s total embrace.

Praxis, Reflection, Repeat

The process of praxis and reflection is an essential theological method for faith communities looking to thoughtfully engage in the task of liberation. Much like the work of liberation, the process of praxis and reflection is ongoing. It begins with a faithful action—initiating a new ministry, forging a community partnership, engaging in a congregational project, etc.—and is followed by an assessment of that faithful action. After such an evaluation occurs, the process begins again, this time, with an action plan refreshed and informed by what was discovered

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during the course of reflection. Utilizing this kind of sustained theological method of praxis-reflection-praxis with regards to issues of mental health in the church, faith communities will mature into a deeper understanding that mental illness is neither punishment for one’s humanity, nor is it a symbol of God’s disappointment in one’s life choices. Meaningful connections with marginalized and oppressed peoples strengthens the practice of critical reflection within churches willing to reach outside of themselves.

**Solidarity**

The church’s pastoral response to the oppression of the poor is to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized and join in their quest for freedom. These are not tasks carried out by the church on behalf of marginalized groups, but are done with them as they struggle to pave the way toward their own liberation.17 Actions that call us into solidarity with others are outward signs of support that work toward the reign of peace and justice for all people. Liberation theology, therefore, is a theology of action—a call for the unafflicted to leave the interior safety of the church and enter into the exterior realities of the afflicted in their communities. Gutiérrez recognized that all too often it was the poor who were “absent” from the Latin American church, a term he uses to describe peoples who are “of little or no importance, and without the opportunity to give expression of themselves to their sufferings, their comraderies, their plans, their hopes.”18 Likewise, in the United States, people with mental health challenges are largely absent from faith communities. Adhering to the ideals of liberation theology can help guide faith communities as they actively work alongside people with mental health problems to reclaim their place in the Body of Christ.

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Faith communities have often hidden those with mental health problems away from sight. They choose not to see them because of the uncomfortable or awkward parts of their behavior that challenge mainstream social norms. Communities of faith can, however, play an active role in the recovery and rehabilitation of people living with mental health problems. Community psychiatric chaplain John Swinton provides an example of how a church positively engaged with a person struggling with a mental health challenge. Swinton writes about David, who, due to serious mental health problems, lived in children’s homes since the age of eight. Upon his discharge at age 22, David found a church home. When he initially attended this church, there was a mutual tentativeness and apprehension between the congregation and David. It took time for people to become acquainted with some of David’s unique habits and quirks: his excitability, his tendency to over-share personal experiences, and his short attention span that often caused him to leave worship and return in the middle of reverent moments.

After some preliminary adjustment, David began to attend a mid-week Bible study. Overtime, other members of the Bible study began to see David as a person who, while at times was “almost completely obscured by a particularly unpleasant mental health problem, was at other times a person who not only needed to be cared for, but who cared for them and enjoyed their company.”19 This kind of theological work is reciprocal; it helps faith communities deepen their understanding of mental illness and helps people with mental health problems remember that they are beloved children of God worthy of the company and friendship of others. It is through the relationships we form with one another that we are more fully known. Friendship is a way for people to authentically enter into each other’s worlds, a powerful foundation toward building empathy and awareness for the “other.” In David’s case, his presence helped the church

19 Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person*, 159.
change its perceptions of people living with mental illness, and in turn, helped David reestablish a place in his community after a lengthy and lonely period of hospitalization.

David’s story is an example of what can happen when faith communities engage in theological tasks of liberation. When the church stands alongside people like David, it creates a space of solidarity that allows individuals to regain access to the personal empowerment that enables them to be “active agents of their own destiny.” This is especially important for individuals with mental health problems, whose sense of empowerment is often diminished or even taken away during the course of their illness and treatment. Acts of solidarity help the church reconceptualize its beliefs about mental illness in ways that allow one’s authentic personhood to override harmful stereotypical images of illness.

Gutiérrez writes that for many Latin Americans, poverty is synonymous with death. Little or no access to reliable sources of food, housing, employment, and medical care destroys relationships, slashes hope, and leaves individuals and families in constant states of distress. People living with mental health problems experience many of the same socio-economic barriers that account for material poverty. They can also encounter challenges that expose them to relational and spiritual aspects of poverty. The complexities of their illnesses, when compounded by false ideologies, stigmatizing attitudes, and social marginalization, contribute to the breakdown of meaningful relationships and the loss of one’s sense of self. Therefore, another way for faith communities to stand in solidarity with people living with mental health challenges is to engage with them in activities that enable them to live as authentically human as possible. These

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20 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, xxi.
21 Swinton, Resurrecting the Person, 171.
22 Swinton, Resurrecting the Person, 160.
23 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, xxi.
24 Swinton, Resurrecting the Person, 17.
activities, which can range from advocating for legislation that grants better access to mental healthcare, to simply making the commitment to openly discuss topics of mental health within the church, contribute to the rehumanization of people with mental health problems.

The process of rehumanization works to abolish the systems, structures, and attitudes that dehumanize people with mental health problems. Before communities of faith can engage in this process, they need to gain awareness of the political, societal, cultural, and spiritual practices that challenge the most basic human rights, dignities, and freedoms of people living with mental health challenges. These practices are subtle, yet powerful, and occur in nearly all dimensions of human life. They often manifest themselves informally by means of “unnoticed and unreflective speech, bodily reaction to others, conventional practices of everyday interactions and evaluations, aesthetic judgments, and the jokes, images, and the stereotypes pervading the mass media.”

**The Disabled God**

Author, scholar, and disability advocate, Nancy Eiesland, was an influential voice during the height of the disability rights movement of the 1990s. Disabled from birth, her work advocated for the full emancipation and inclusion of people with disabilities in every strata of society—especially within communities of faith. While the locus of her work pertained to people with physical disabilities, she acknowledged that the term “disability” includes a broad “variety of physical, psychological, and intellectual impairments,” meaning that her writing about physical disability equally applies to the experiences of people living with mental health challenges.

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25 Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person*, 17.
26 Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person*, 20.
The pinnacle of Eiesland’s work is captured in the revelation of the disabled God, a radical reconceptualization of Christ’s physical body. The disabled God is a striking image that challenges traditional theological interpretations relating to the person and nature of Christ. The incarnation begins with the story of God coming to earth in a body that no one expected. Jesus did not enter our humanity as a powerful warrior or the commanding king we anticipated, but as a helpless child born in a shed among sheep and cattle. After the resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples in another type of unexpected body—a body noticeably altered by the sin and injustices of the world he died to save. A short passage in Luke’s gospel recounts this moment:

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

The moment Jesus revealed his scarred hands, feet, and side to his friends was the moment he embodied the disabled God. Our bodies can also exhibit the signs of oppression and injustice. As we meditate on the impaired body of the risen Christ, we see our own human experience reflected back at us. Therefore, the image of the disabled God affirms that “full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.” The concept of the disabled God, who descended from heaven, embodied human personhood, and bore the physical scars of suffering reminds us that we do not have to live in estrangement from our own imperfect bodies, but can access reconciliation within ourselves and within our communities of faith—another manifestation of the Body of Christ.

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28 Luke 24:36–39 (NRSV will be used throughout).
29 Eiesland, The Disabled God, 100.
30 Eiesland, The Disabled God, 100.
Eiesland’s concept of the disabled God materialized through conversations and interactions with fellow disability rights activists. As their community’s common longing for justice and equality continued, they began to reflect upon what this kind of justice would look like in faith communities. Eiesland awaited a “mighty revelation from God,” but instead received an unexpected epiphany. She saw God in a wheelchair just like hers; “not an omnipotent, self-sufficient God, but neither a pitiable, suffering servant.” In this moment, God revealed himself to her as a “survivor, unpitying, and forthright.” A God whose sovereignty is contained in a wheelchair instead of a towering throne adorned with all the bejeweled elements of royalty is a jarring, even confusing image for many people. For people with mental health challenges, particularly those with histories of suicidal ideation, an even more revolutionary idea springs forth from Eiesland’s concept of the disabled God: God is a survivor.

**Suicidality and God the Survivor**

The church has grappled with the topic of suicide for generations. Suicide and suicidality are perhaps two of the most stigmatized and misunderstood topics of mental illness both inside and outside of faith communities. Suicidality is a term used to describe one’s risk of suicide, whether by ideation or intent, whereas suicide is the act of executing oneself. It is no surprise, then, that when a person dies by suicide, the responses of others are often reactionary, uninformed, and insensitive to both the memory of the deceased person and the family that is left behind. A person’s life is not exclusively defined by any one action but is the culmination of personal

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32 Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 89.
33 Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 89.
34 Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 89.
experiences and contributions to the lives of their loved ones and communities over a lifetime. The temptation to define someone’s life by their manner of death is to dismiss the fullness of their story and the dignity of their personhood.

In the context of mental illness, the term “survivor” is often used to describe a person who has lived through a suicide attempt. The notion of a God who survives carries significant implications for people who struggle with suicidality. It offers new meaning for their journeys, places them in deeper connection with a compassionate God, and lessens the feelings of shame that often define the experience of suicidality.

In the aftermath of a suicide attempt, a person might experience intense feelings of guilt, humiliation, and isolation. These emotions can come from within the person, or they can be assigned to that person by outside persons and institutions. The stigma of suicide is magnified in the church, where in some faith communities it is equated with sin. Many faith communities continue to maintain that people who die by suicide do not enjoy a place of eternal peace with God but pay for their self-inflicted sin by remaining in perpetual pain.36 This position, void of liberation and empty of grace, propagates the stigma that death by suicide is sinful and therefore merits the punishment of eternal damnation.

Rates of suicide in the United States are linked to several risk factors. An undeniable risk factor of suicide that receives little attention is the breakdown and failure of the very systems created to provide assistance and rehabilitation for troubled people. For people experiencing suicidality, it is the distress of stigma and alienation ascribed by their communities, the lack of insurance or poor access to appropriate medical care, or the threat of eternal damnation emanating from the church that keep them from seeking and receiving the help they need.

36 Peter Preus, And She was a Christian: Why Do Believers Commit Suicide? (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2011), 14.
Without an obvious way out and no one to turn to, it is unfortunate, but understandable, that people die by suicide in a desperate effort to either end their pain or terminate their consciousness. People who die by suicide, however, are indeed survivors, even if only in spirit. Their pain is sanctified as they find rest in the arms of a God who survived the fight that culminated in the death of death.

The concept of God as a survivor offers a measure of hope and comfort not only to people who experience suicide or suicidality, but to people who live with the infinite pain of losing a loved one to suicide. God the survivor also brings peace to people who engage in other forms of self-harm. It may be a comfort for them to gaze upon their own scars and recall the scarred hands, feet, and side of the disabled God. The disabled God is not merely an “overcomer,” but a representation of the joys and pains of life that do not exist separate from one another, but often occur simultaneously.

The Perception of Brokenness

Another theme emerging from the concept of the disabled God is that of brokenness—a feeling shared by people with physical and psychological disabilities. When a person’s body or mind betrays them, causing their physical or mental faculties to fade or disappear, they sense the impact of brokenness. From a young age, we are taught to believe that embodying a disability infers something about us is damaged. The image of the disabled God reminds us that our perceived brokenness is just that—a perception. If the disabled God can embody impaired hands, feet, and side and remain the imago Dei, as members of God’s creation, we, too, can declare that

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37 Preus, *And She was a Christian*, 93.
38 Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 103.
we bear the image of God even through the presence of disability. Reconceptualizing Christ in this way transforms the understanding of our own brokenness as commemorated in the Eucharist.

The word “broken” is an essential piece of the communion liturgy. The eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians echoes what we now refer to as the words of institution:

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

We approach the table of the Lord as broken people. As we receive the gifts of bread and wine, we behold the broken body of Christ and remember that the resurrection is not a story of perfect triumph. Rather, it is a multidimensional story of struggle and perseverance, of pain and joy, of life and death. The presence of the disabled God is a part of our stories, too, and is kept alive in human history as we come to understand that brokenness is not the end, but an invitation to a new beginning—an approach that embraces our broken pieces for what they teach us about wholeness, not as defining elements of our identities. Christ’s body was the instrument of God’s salvation for all of creation. The miracle of the Eucharist, then, is the “hope and possibility of liberation welling up from a broken body.”

The Mind of God

The disabled God connects our brokenness with the impaired, but divine body of the crucified and risen Christ. While this was a groundbreaking, liberating concept for people with physical disabilities, it is only the beginnings of a theology that speaks directly to people with mental health challenges. Jesus’ physical body was subjected to pain and torture, yet it is largely

39 1 Corinthians 11:23–25.
40 Eiesland, The Disabled God, 114.
unknown whether he endured the kinds of mental or emotional pain that would torture his mind.

This exploration into the mind of God, then, is an attempt to consider connections between notions of mental illness and the lived realities of Jesus. In doing so, people living with mental health challenges are able to equate their experience of mental illness with that of a God who, although fully divine, was also fully human, thereby linking their illness experience with the experience of authentic personhood. While the scriptures only provide small glimpses into Jesus’ emotional life, we can observe moments of apparent grief, fear, anxiety, sadness, and anguish. Biblical accounts of Jesus’ experiences with the death of a friend, a painful prayer in the garden, and his crucifixion and death will be central to our consideration of the realities of Jesus’ humanity and how those experiences may have affected his emotional and mental states.

In the story of Lazarus’ resurrection in the gospel of John, we encounter a Jesus that is deeply grieved by the death of his friend:

> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

As Mary, a sister of Lazarus, knelt before him, Jesus was affected in a way that “disturbed” his spirit at the sight of her weeping. Perhaps this was an empathetic reaction to her tears, but we of course can only speculate what it may have meant for Jesus to be “deeply moved.” Jesus then asked to be taken to Lazarus’ tomb. When he finally saw for himself that his friend was dead, Jesus began to weep in a manner that led bystanders to conclude, “See how he loved him!”

While the reader understands that Jesus knows he will raise Lazarus to life again, as was revealed in an earlier verse, this did not “prevent his eruption of painful emotions.”

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reacted to the sight of Lazarus’ lifeless body with a sadness that was genuine and profound. He openly entered into his grief in front of others—an indication that one’s faith does not preclude acknowledging and bearing the pain of loss.

In the final days before his arrest, suffering, and death, Jesus appears to experience a powerful wave of emotions that could indicate some level of psychological distress. After he observes the Passover meal with his disciples, they retreat to Gethsemane, where Jesus asks them to keep him company while he prays to his Father:

> He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

In this passage, Jesus is “deeply grieved” to the point of death and “distressed and agitated.” Assuming that his friends would remain awake with him, he heaves himself on the ground and appears to cry out in desperation to his Father. “If it were possible,” he says, “…remove this cup from me,” as if to say, “Please, anything but this!” Although Jesus knew of his fate for some time, he made one last appeal before decidedly submitting to the will of his Father: “not what I want, but what you want,” he said. Within a span of three verses, this pericope suggests that Jesus appears anxious, distressed, and agitated amid immense desperation, conflict, and fear regarding his impending death. Furthermore, upon discovering his disciples asleep for the third time, Jesus utters a response tinged with both disbelief and ire: “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough!”

44 Mark 14:33–36.
45 Mark 14:41.
crucifixion is a corollary to the state of mind of people experiencing mental, emotional, or even psychological distress.

Jesus’ crucifixion was a time of palpable agony, despair, and sorrow. His Seven Last Words from the Cross, scattered throughout all four gospels, provide us with another glimpse into his state of mind during an obvious time of suffering:

1. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)
2. “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)
3. “Woman, here is your son.” To the disciples: “Here is your mother.” (John 19:26-27)
4. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34)
5. “I am thirsty.” (John 19:38)
6. “It is finished.” (John 19:30)

Contained in the Seven Last Words from the Cross are the sentiments Jesus felt were worth repeating as he slowly died. They are words of mercy (“Father, forgive them…”), words of reassurance (“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me…”), and words of transparency (“Woman, here is your [dying] son…”). The fourth utterance (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) is perhaps the phrase that most greatly exposes his humanity as he asks his heavenly Father “…why have you forsaken me?” It is a question people with mental health challenges often ask themselves when they feel rejected or abandoned by God. The fifth word (“I am thirsty.”) expresses a basic human need, followed by the realization that death is nigh (“It is finished,”). As Jesus dies, he declares that his spirit is now on its way to the Father (“Father, Into your hands I commend my spirit.”) thereby fulfilling the will of God for all creation.

Jesus’ humanity is not fully contained in the Biblical narrative handed down to us in the gospels. The inferences we draw from these vignettes of Jesus’ last days on earth do not allow us to fully know his authentic, lived experience of being human. Likewise, we cannot assume that Jesus ever experienced the presence of psychological disorder or distress according to our
contemporary understanding of mental illness; the classification, symptoms, and prevalence of illness undoubtedly fluctuate across cultures and time periods. However, Jesus encountered similar thoughts, feelings, and emotions that, when unregulated or unmedicated, mirror present-day manifestations of mental illness.

**Toward a Theology of Mental Health**

Marcia Webb in her book, *Toward a Liberatory Theology of Psychological Disorder*, reflects upon how and in what ways faith communities acknowledge the presence of mental illness in their congregations, if at all. “If the church is silent about these problems,” she writes, “how then do believers understand mental disorder from the perspective of Christian faith?” The messages presented by the church regarding mental disorder are often in conflict with the positions posited by medical research and mental health professionals. This “incongruity” between a person’s sense of self and their relationship to their faith community can “become a source of confusion and distress” for people living with psychological disorders.

Webb’s initial research into the positions of several mainline denominations shows that many “endorse scientific conceptions of psychological disorder.” Despite different denominational efforts and written statements of support, research still shows there remains a “continuing challenge to reduce negative attitudes about mental illness in the church.” Webb classifies these enduring attitudes as negative lay theologies. The beliefs perpetuated by these

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theologies are not necessarily espoused by entire denominations but are the result of long-standing attitudes and views of certain faith communities.\textsuperscript{51}

**Negative Lay Theologies**

Negative lay theologies are extra-Biblical beliefs about mental illness that cause communities of faith to interpret psychological disorder as demonic, self-inflicted, and sinful. They are learned, passed down, and maintained by religious beliefs that are typically not linked to scholarly conclusions of theologians or mental health experts. Negative lay theologies cling to old ideas springing from a time before the advent of contemporary models of mental health and wellness.\textsuperscript{52} Despite a growing field of medical knowledge, some congregations maintain outdated attitudes toward mental health disorders that keep people with these disorders from full inclusion and participation within communities of faith.

Throughout the course of Webb’s research, streams of negative lay theologies began to surface from three different sources: evangelical beliefs, messages from best-selling Christian self-help books, and recorded narratives that people with mental health problems experienced while attending church.\textsuperscript{53} The results of questionnaires and other qualitative research conducted by Webb and others expose some general patterns in religious beliefs concerning mental illness, in particular, clinical depression. Churches in the United States that practice more conservative, evangelical, or Pentecostal theologies are often suspicious of mental health professionals and therefore encourage their parishioners struggling with a possible mental health problem to seek initial help from their pastors.\textsuperscript{54} They are also more likely to explain depression either as a

\textsuperscript{52} Webb, *Toward a Liberatory Theology*, 10.
\textsuperscript{53} Webb, *Toward a Liberatory Theology*, 10.
\textsuperscript{54} Webb, *Toward a Liberatory Theology*, 11.
spiritual problem of the individual or as evidence of demonic possession, both of which are seen as treatable through prayer and active participation in church activities such as worship. A separate study among Pentecostals in the United States shows that people attribute causes of depression to a number of factors, including: disobeying God, demonic influences, negative thinking, the death of a loved one, terminal illness, child abuse, or rape. In addition to prayer and participation in worship, the recommended treatment for depression includes reading the Bible, pastoral counseling, and confession of sin.

Webb also investigates messages about mental illness as presented in the Christian self-help genre. After she and her research team evaluated fourteen best-selling books, they were able to draw a few general conclusions. Webb notes that most of these books only address depression and ignore other forms of psychological disorder. They offer a variety of reasons for the onset of symptoms, including demonic forces and negative thoughts and emotions contributing to a person’s “overall failure” as a Christian. Other Christian authors write that depressive symptoms are “rooted in the realm of the soul and spirit,” such as ingratitude, unresolved conflict, irresponsibility, guilt, bitterness, unforgiveness, unbelief, claiming of rights, anger, and self-centeredness. Less common conclusions are ties to negative self-images, relationship challenges, biological factors, and the “common vulnerability in a fallen world.” Many Christian authors recommend some of the same treatments cited by conservative, evangelical church bodies. They tout a “one-size-fits-all approach” that includes trusting in God, regular attendance of church activities, confession of sin, prayers, and the use of willpower to ward off

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60 Webb, *Toward a Liberatory Theology*, 16.
depressed moods. Unfortunately, there is little mention of the need to acquire knowledge about mental illness, seek talk therapy, inquire about medications, build social and community support systems, and make adjustments to exercise and nutrition. Webb also cites an online study of Catholics and Protestants that reveal disturbing experiences people encounter in their communities of faith. “I felt shunned at church,” reports one person, “A lot of people were afraid of me.” Others report that some church members suggested they did not actually have a mental illness despite a medical diagnosis from a mental health professional, while others were encouraged to discontinue their medications.

Webb’s investigation led her to conclude that more exploration on this topic is needed. While some of her findings suggest that many Christians have positive, supportive views about people with mental health problems, there is a growing amount of research that favors negative, non-scientific religious perspectives. These conclusions are contributing factors in the presence of negative lay theologies in communities of faith. Negative lay theologies purport that people with mental health problems are themselves the source of their emotional and spiritual misery. In doing so, they instill additional fear, foreboding, and blame in the lives of people who struggle with legitimate psychological disorders. Sadness and depression, whether they are attributed to a clinical diagnosis, are common human reactions to difficult human experiences. When faith communities choose to reflect and respond to these challenges with acts of solidarity and support, people with mental health challenges can experience recovery and begin to reclaim their lives. If more faith communities destigmatize and normalize the presence of mental health

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61 Webb, *Toward a Liberatory Theology*, 16.
challenges, an entire subset of conservative Christians might find the freedom to seek and receive the mental health care they need without the added stigmas of shame and rejection.

**Liberation Theology at Work in Mental Health Ministry**

Meaningful theological transformation of mental health issues within faith communities will demand dedicated and courageous efforts of individual parishioners, church leadership, small group ministries, seminaries, and the formation of community partnerships. Even more conservative, evangelical faith communities cleaving to negative lay theologies of mental illness will somehow need to create a path forward. Because these congregations are often suspicious of outsiders in their midst, it will take voices from the inside of these faith communities to initiate pathways to new, positive beliefs and attitudes about mental health issues. It will also require those who serve the church in non-pastoral roles (e.g., musicians, Sunday School leaders, youth group coordinators, small group volunteers) to consider how their ministries might benefit from adopting theological perspectives that advocate for and engage with those who struggle with mental health challenges.

A theology of mental health is undeniably rooted in liberation theology and calls the church into action—not on behalf of people with mental health challenges, but in collaboration with them. The path toward liberation necessitates the wisdom of reflection, actions of solidarity (e.g., sustained friendship), and the adoption of new images and beliefs (e.g., the disabled God that reframes concepts of brokenness and survival). In the spirit of liberation, therefore, the conclusion of this chapter is a compilation of theological tasks for faith communities to consider as they answer the call to be active agents in the formation of a theology of mental health. These action items, inspired by the theological contributions of Nancy Eiesland, John Swinton, and
Marcia Webb, are intended to guide faith communities toward thoughtful deliberation on how mental health ministry can enrich their congregations, embolden their communities, and bring about healing in the world. While this work is demanding and challenging, it is time to tear down archaic religious conceptions of mental illness. The deconstruction of harmful theologies of blame invites people with mental health challenges to arise from the shadows of their hidden histories and enter into the collaborative healing opportunities that communities of faith provide.

**Considerations for Practitioners**

1. **Seek Understanding: Reflecting Upon Our Brokenness**

   Mental illness is often stigmatized and misunderstood by congregations and those in positions of church leadership. People with mental health problems are already among us in our communities of faith despite the feelings or beliefs we may hold around issues of mental illness. The church, therefore, has a responsibility to increase its knowledge and awareness of mental illness, its challenges, and the people who live with these disorders every day. The presence of mental illness does not result in a broken person, but it can break a person’s spirit, sometimes even crushing their will to exist. Faith communities, by reflecting upon their own brokenness, can begin to understand their role in the healing and rehabilitation processes of others.

2. **Invite Conversation and Forge Connections: Building Solidarity through Friendship**

   A church that seeks to understand mental illness and its challenges need only begin with a simple conversation. People with mental health problems have stories and experiences that are better understood when processed in the supportive presence of others. As Swinton reminds us, “Mental health challenges disrupt our stories and as such disrupt our sense of self; who we
perceive ourselves to be in the world…We are not simply defined by our brains. There are other stories that need to be told.” Inviting people with these challenges into conversation is a way for faith communities to practice the art of active listening while acquainting themselves with real people who live with real mental health problems. These conversations are not opportunities to evangelize; neither are they attempts to dispute or change someone’s beliefs. They are occasions for the church to stand in solidarity with people by honoring the realities of their everyday lives that have been interrupted by mental illness. In doing so, these conversations extend a measure of the same love, compassion, and friendship that God extends to every member of creation without exception. Remaining with people as they sift through the hard truths related to their mental illness allows communities of faith to examine their own lingering prejudices and stigmas that tend to place stereotypes above an individual’s authentic personhood.

3. Acknowledge Uncertainty: Discovering Solidarity in our Common Fears

Seeking understanding through authentic conversations with people living with mental illness may elicit fear in some congregations. Many churches often wonder: How can we possibly know what to say or do in the face of a person’s mental illness? What if we make a mistake and people get hurt? What happens if our attempts prove us ill-equipped to provide the help that people with mental health problems need? What do we do if someone’s mental illness causes them to behave in ways that put other lives in danger? The less exposure a congregation

65 Webb, Toward a Liberatory Theology, x.
66 Swinton, Resurrecting the Person, 160.
67 While accidents relating to mental health crises do happen and people sometimes do get hurt, the notion that people with mental illness are violent and dangerous is a gross stereotype. Research shows that rather than being the perpetrator, people with mental illness are much more likely to be the victims of violent crime and do not exhibit violent behavior. Instead, current data supports the assertion that people who commit violent crimes do so because of factors other than mental illness, including prior histories of aggression, substance abuse problems, experiences
has with mental illness and those that experience it, the more likely they are to be afraid of what they do not yet know. For people living with mental health challenges, however, fear is a normative piece of their experience in society and in the church. They fear the pains of stigma, judgment, humiliation, and rejection—the possibility that they will never be understood or accepted apart from their illness. A faith community that risks acknowledging their fears surrounding topics of mental illness, therefore, has already begun to align itself with people for whom fear is an ordinary part of their experience. People with mental health challenges do not often have the option to ignore their fears. Their lives can depend upon their ability to identify, enter into, and work through them. Likewise, the church can no longer justify its inaction regarding its task of liberating people with mental health problems from the stigmas that some faith communities have historically upheld and perpetuated.

Risk-taking is part of the work of liberation, helping faith communities access the knowledge and awareness required for growth and vitality. It is natural to be afraid of what one does not yet comprehend; it is harmful, however, to remain paralyzed in that fear. Be afraid, acknowledge uncertainty, dedicate time to navigate these feelings, and then reorganize. Ask the hard questions, expect even harder answers, and then ask for help and guidance. Naturally, mistakes and misunderstandings will happen along the way. Humbly request forgiveness and allow grace to provide a path for moving forward. Furthermore, remember the spirit of liberation is not one of neutrality, but of action, and that spirit rarely settles for the status quo. Therefore, a church’s silence toward issues of mental illness and the people who endure them is a position in

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itself—one of apathy and discrimination. Through it all, remember why the church engages in this kind of demanding work: the lives and freedoms of actual people are at stake.

4. Create a Thirst for Knowledge: Solidarity through Education

Obtaining knowledge about mental illness and other related topics can lessen the fears and uncertainties of the unknown. If congregations are not presented with other means for understanding what it is like for someone to live with a mental health challenge, they will continue to adhere to the common misperceptions disseminated by mainstream society and media. Creating community events and other educational opportunities allows congregations to reflect upon their current beliefs related to mental illness and decipher other ways of interpreting and understanding them. Building a culture of reflection and cultivating a thirst for knowledge breaks down the barriers that keep communities of faith from entering into solidarity with others. Along the way, approach unfamiliar topics with curiosity and compassion and attempt to create safe spaces for people to ask difficult questions. This process often benefits from the guidance of a local mental health professional or a clergyperson with a background in mental health counseling.

5. Develop a Mental Health Ministry in your Congregation: Solidarity through Ministry

As congregations gain more knowledge and understanding about mental illness through conversations, interactions, and educational opportunities alongside people who have experience with mental health challenges, they are better prepared to initiate a mental health ministry. A

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68 Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 63.
ministry of mental health can assume many forms and offer a number of different approaches, some of which include:

a. Support Groups: Solidarity in Shared Experiences

Support groups create safe, confidential spaces for people with mental health challenges and their loved ones to share their experiences and hear the narratives of other people who are navigating similar obstacles. *Fresh Hope for Mental Health* is an example of a Christian support group.69 Other non-religious options are offered through agencies like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)70, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)71, among others.

b. Form a Mental Health Ministry Team: Collaborative Reflection

The formation of a ministry team helps recruit others to assist in the establishment and development of a mental health ministry, as no one can or should be expected to accomplish this kind of task alone. The team serves as an arm of a preexisting ministry of pastoral care, or, depending on the congregation, it could stand on its own. Regardless, this team approach can be an effective way for ministry volunteers to connect with one another, reflect upon the state of the ministry, and discuss dreams and goals for its future.

c. Offer Mental Health First Aid: Solidarity Through Awareness and Education

Ministries continue to thrive when their leaders continue to generate creative opportunities for growth. Maintain this momentum through small, one-time ministry opportunities such as a training course in mental health first aid. A number of professional mental health agencies may offer these trainings at little or no cost and will even conduct the training directly on the church’s campus. A mental health first aid course not only benefits

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church staff, members of the congregation, and other ministry leaders, it also serves as an outward sign of the church’s commitment to mental health awareness and advocacy.

**d. Build Community: Solidarity through Partnerships**

A congregation’s mental health ministry is strengthened when it partners with its community’s mental health professionals, non-profits, and other agencies that advocate for people with mental illness. Such partnerships connect congregations with additional knowledge, educational opportunities, and resources that are helpful in the formation and maintenance of a well-rounded ministry of mental health. Community partners, thereby, are the church’s allies in its work of liberation. In addition to developing meaningful connections in one’s neighborhood, community partners can be instrumental in linking congregations with the necessary resources and protocols for what to do in the case of a mental health crisis.

**e. Plan for Crises: Solidarity Keeps People Alive**

One reality of mental health ministry is the possibility of a mental health crisis. Mental health experts can assist congregations in creating protocols for how to take appropriate action in the case that someone needs help beyond what communities of faith can offer. These protocols can then be shared with church leadership, members of the church’s mental health ministry team, and support group attendees. Some mental health professionals many encourage a congregation to have each support group participant draw up and sign a personal emergency plan complete with names and contact information of family members and current physicians. Equally essential to any mental health ministry is a prepared list of names, addresses, and contact information for local hospitals, psychiatric facilities, therapists, and psychiatrists. These kinds of safety considerations help keep all mental health ministry volunteers and participants protected and are
not to be overlooked. A ministry of mental health, therefore, much like a theology of mental health, not only works to include all life, but it also works to protect and sustain all life.

**f. Mental Health Ministry in the Worship Service: Solidarity through Liturgy**

Worship services are practical and consistent outlets through which to gradually build awareness of theological issues related to mental health. Anyone who assists with weekly worship planning—including pastors, musicians, and children and youth ministry leaders—can find compassionate, inclusive ways to weave these topics into Sunday morning liturgies. These efforts can range from the subtle (e.g., praying for people with mental health challenges), to the all-encompassing (e.g., observing Mental Health Awareness Sunday). The inclusion of topics related to mental illness in the liturgy spreads awareness of these issues, reduces their stigma, and normalizes people with mental health challenges as subjects of theological inquiry.\(^\text{72}\)

Furthermore, a thorough evaluation of a congregation’s current hymn and song repertoire is an equally worthwhile exercise. In doing so, one might uncover language and images that are potentially detrimental to people living with mental health challenges. This topic will be considered with greater depth in a later chapter.

**g. Reframe and Reconceptualize: The Disabled God Points Us Toward Liberation**

Throughout a congregation’s process of building a formal mental health ministry, it will continue to grapple with several complicated questions: What is the role of the church in the rehabilitation and liberation of people with mental health challenges? How does the church communicate its beliefs and positions on issues of mental health? What messages do those beliefs send about the nature of God and God’s love for God’s people? Are there existing theologies and practices that prevent the church from engaging in tasks of liberation? How might

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these theologies and practices be reconsidered, reconceptualized, and reframed to enable the church to continue its liberating work?

Communities of faith transmit their theology and beliefs through their worship and music practices. It is therefore a worthwhile exercise for anyone who plans and facilitates worship to take a step back and decipher if the liturgical and musical language found in weekly worship is a force of liberation or a force of suppression for the “other” among us. As revealed in the first chapter, I have experienced the empowering freedom that the church can provide people struggling with a mental health challenge. My community of faith occupied an important role in my process of personal healing and recovery. Not only did the church encourage me to reveal my story, but it also granted me the necessary space to share that story within my faith community so that others might experience the same support and grace I received in my time of need. As a pastoral musician, music was inevitably the primary outlet that helped provide authentic theological expressions to these experiences. The hymns and spiritual songs of the church are dripping with theology, making music a versatile tool for continuing the theological tasks of liberation.
CHAPTER 3:
MENTAL HEALTH JUSTICE AND THE PASTORAL MUSICIAN:
SINGING TOWARD LIBERATION

“The beauty and power of community is we can be surrounded by other people who hold the hope for us, when we are unable to hold it for ourselves. The power of communities holding onto hope is transformative. This is what faith communities are born to do.”

—Sarah Lund

Vignette: Young Person Seeks Help after Attending Mental Health-Themed Hymn Festival

It was the first Friday of October 2018. Christ the King Lutheran Church’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope had come and gone for another year. The event was a meaningful evening of prayer, anointing for healing, personal testimony, performances by local community choral ensembles, and of course, congregational singing—all in an effort for our community of faith to shine a light on National Mental Health Awareness Week. After the festival, attendees mingled in the narthex, musicians filed their music away in the choir room, while a few of the performers stayed behind to tidy up the sanctuary. Suddenly, an impassioned young voice springing forth from the back of the sanctuary caught my attention. I turned around and saw a young woman—maybe twelve or thirteen years old—talking to who I assumed were her parents. “You see,” she said, motioning with her hands toward the chancel, “even the church says that going to counseling is okay. I really want to do this. Can you make an appointment for me now—please?”

Weeks later I met with the executive director of Seasons Counseling of Michiana, a professional counseling service with whom Christ the King shares its building. She revealed that

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1 Sarah Lund, Blessed Union: Breaking the Silence on Mental Illness and Marriage (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2021), 124.
Seasons recently accepted a new client: a young woman about thirteen who was troubled by some negative social experiences in school. The girl revealed to her new therapist that she wanted to attend counseling for a long time, but her parents were hesitant, brushing her requests for treatment aside; assuring her that with time, things would simply work themselves out. “Had it not been for her family’s experience at the hymn festival,” the executive director told me, “this young woman might still be suffering in silence.”

I knew that this new client was most likely the young woman I encountered the evening of the hymn festival; the same girl I heard pleading with her parents for professional help. I was reminded that when the church accesses the courage and humility to address difficult topics with honesty and compassion—even highly stigmatized topics like mental illness—that peoples’ lives can be changed and healed in the safety of a loving faith community. It is God’s gift of music that provides us with a path toward this kind of transformative liberation.

Music, Liturgy, and Forging Shalom: Creating Compassionate Faith Communities

This chapter assesses the role faith communities play in the practice of what Gustavo Gutiérrez calls forging shalom, with a focus on mental illness and the people who live with these conditions. When faith communities strive to cultivate peace and freedom in solidarity with people living with mental health challenges, mental health justice reigns. This process begins when we share our stories with each other; not just the stories we want people to hear or the stories we think they can handle, but the real, gritty, messy stories that truly shape who we are as individuals and players in God’s good creation. Pastor and author Sarah Lund believes that stories break the silence of mental illness and allow people with these conditions to tell their

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entire narratives—to bring their difficult truths to the table where they can be heard and seen in the safety of a compassionate faith community.³

Recall for a moment the opening vignette: we heard the real story of a young woman who convinced her parents to send her to counseling after attending a hymn festival—a hymn festival that through word and song featured actual stories of people living with mental health challenges. This is not just any hymn festival; its purpose is to tell the truth about mental illness—about what it is like to live with a mental health condition while remaining God’s beloved child. The Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is just one way Christ the King Lutheran Church introduces themes of mental health justice into our gathered worshipping community. For mental health justice to prevail, we address the truth about mental illness by singing about these challenging topics together. Singing in community grants us a measure of understanding within ourselves that then allows us to extend this understanding to others, to their experiences, and to how they live in the world. To further illustrate this, we will examine a case study of mental health justice in action at Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend, Indiana. In recent years, Christ the King’s music ministry restructured itself to incorporate the concerns of the surrounding community which, in our context, included feelings of loneliness and isolation. Finally, we will consider the role of the pastoral musician—not only as one who selects hymns and songs that encourage stories of mental illness to surface in worship settings—but as a model for the personal vulnerability required to empower others to share their truths in a community that reflects God’s love and justice for everyone.

This quest for belonging and equality, especially for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, is a hallmark task of liberation theology. God’s justice favors the poor and

³ Sarah Lund, Blessed are the Crazy (Nashville: Chalice Press, 2014), 82-83.
oppressed, as Mary’s *Magnificat* states in Luke 1:52–53: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

In our daily life and work, we as people of God are called to uphold the lowly, feed the hungry, and create communities of peace and justice. This charge is also apparent in the words of the prophet, Micah, who wrote that we are to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” with God (Micah 6:8). God’s preference of justice for the lowly shines through us when we strive to create a more just society—and just faith communities—for all people by using the gifts God entrusts to us for the benefit of others. Pastoral musicians possess special gifts that afford communities of faith opportunities to strengthen their calling to pursue justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

It is, perhaps, novel for pastoral musicians to understand themselves as agents of liberation and justice in their communities. Over many years of dedication and long hours of practice and performances, musicians spend their formative years honing their musical skills. With the intense work ethic, performance schedule, and teaching obligations that many pastoral musicians maintain, where do we find the time to devote ourselves to the quest for liberation and justice among the most vulnerable people in our communities? Some find ways to combine aspects of social activism with music ministry to bring about awareness and change to the social fabric of their neighborhoods. At times faith communities insert themselves into neighborhood conversations, speaking up and acting in solidarity with those in need of support. At other times throughout its history, however, God’s people chose to remain silent, taking little or no action where action was desperately needed.

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4 The NRSV translation will be used throughout.
Pastoral musicians possess many of the necessary skills and resources to help lead others toward the work of liberation. Chapter three urges these musicians to consider how their knowledge about their communities and their musical decisions can help faith communities renew their vision of humanity in ways that advocate for liberation and justice, particularly for people living with mental illness.

A Tyranny of Silence: The Importance of Speaking the Truth About Mental Illness

Even our sincerest, most well-intentioned efforts to advocate for liberation and justice in collaboration with the people that need it most will ultimately fall short of the justice of God. “The justice of God,” writes church musician and theologian, Paul Westermeyer, “always transcends individual movements and, in doing so, turns out to be the most radical of all.”

Regardless of humanity’s natural limitations, God calls us to be a prophetic voice in the face of injustice and inequality. As we will discover, hymn singing helps faith communities uncover their prophetic voice, for hymn singing breaks the “tyranny of silence” around difficult issues with which the church continues to grapple.

The American civil rights movement of the 1960s is an example where faith communities and pastoral musicians joined forces with local communities to advocate for the full recognition and inclusion of African Americans in civic life. Pastoral musician and theologian Don Saliers recalls a musical workshop in Atlanta in May of 1964 called “Sing for Freedom.” This music festival-like event gathered people from all over the nation in an effort to share and experience

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the music of their local communities. “Sing for Freedom” brought together music of northerners and southerners, church musicians and folk musicians, young Black “freedom fighters” and other civil rights activists whose improvisational creativity allowed for the comingling of newly written texts with older melodies. The result was a kind of politically-driven music that, while long-preserved in the religious traditions of marginalized peoples (such as the African American community), gained exposure in the public square and the church as a musical cry for freedom and justice. “The voices of Joan Baez and Mahalia Jackson,” writes Saliers, “were in fact sounding a theological theme: the Christian eschatological hope of a restored moral order, a vision of humanity renewed in justice and peace.”

Should faith communities proceed with the ongoing work of liberation and justice, it will require healthy measures of mercy, forgiveness, and grace for the church to reconcile the parts of its past and present that contribute to the oppression, marginalization, and silencing of the people it is called to serve. As explained in chapter two, people who live with mental health disorders are deeply affected by the church’s historical and theological positions on topics of mental illness. Before exploring how the church can create welcoming spaces for people with mental health disorders through its musical choices and practices, we must consider the ways in which the church and its leadership contribute to the hidden history of people with these disorders.

As today’s faith communities and their leadership navigate an era of declining church attendance and a growing population of people who consider themselves “spiritual, but not religious,” perhaps one of the biggest blunders is the time, energy, and resources that these

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8 Saliers, *Music as Theology*, 198.
9 Saliers, *Music as Theology*, 198.
congregations pour into keeping themselves relevant.\textsuperscript{11,12} A significant need for communities of faith today is to increase their sense of relevance by dedicating their resources to the support and healing of the one in five individuals affected by a diagnosable mental health disorder in any given year.\textsuperscript{13} To stave off the decline in Sunday morning worship attendance, congregations react in substantial ways that send contradictory messages and cloud their mission: these include building larger structures equipped with gyms, creating attractive programming, and installing state-of-the-art audio/video technology to enhance the physical church building or campus.

Westermeyer, citing such decisions as examples of the “ingrownness” of the church, cautions congregations that choose to allocate their resources in insular ways run the risk of losing sight of the tasks that the gospel lays before us: to feed the poor, to care for the hungry, and to work to reverse harmful social ills such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and other sources of systemic injustice.\textsuperscript{14}

It is all too easy for faith communities to lose sight of their priorities in the face of competing trends, attitudes, and ideas espoused by popular culture and mainstream media. Pastoral musicians in pursuit of excellence, especially when making musical and liturgical decisions on behalf of their congregations, also need to understand and weigh the theological issues that these decisions address. As we plan music for our ensembles and for congregational music-making, we can easily fall prey to the sentimental, snobbish, or rigid musical traditions that inform our musical choices more than we care to admit.\textsuperscript{15} Instead of considering how our musical choices reflect the theological and social values of our faith communities, we grow

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{12} Westermeyer, \textit{Let Justice Sing}, 96.
\bibitem{14} Westermeyer, \textit{Let Justice Sing}, 96.
\bibitem{15} Westermeyer, \textit{Let Justice Sing}, 99.
\end{thebibliography}
distracted with what some refer to as the worship wars, or predetermined attitudes and ideas that 
delineate what is “good” and “bad” music, what is “high art” and “low art” music, and what 
makes music sound “right” or “wrong.”

There is more depth of meaning enmeshed in a faith community’s distinctive repertoire 
of hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs than the political correctness of its musical piety. One 
am of pastoral musicians, therefore, is to encourage faith communities to sing hymns and songs 
of praise, thanksgiving, and lament with an authentic, faithful fervor that strengthens the spiritual 
bonds of the community while bringing a heightened awareness to the social and cultural issues 
in their midst. If communities of faith are not provided opportunities to sing hymns and songs 
that nudge them toward a deeper awareness of themselves and their role in the work of liberation 
and justice, they will continue to blindly sing the hymns and songs they have always sung— 
some of which are more than likely antithetical to their message. Pastoral musicians lead their 
congregations down a wider path of awareness and acceptance of the “other” when they consider 
the implications of the current theological state of their ministries. Rooted within a 
congregation’s sung story of faith are theological understandings of the Christian life. A pastoral 
musician’s reflection on the kinds of theological messaging transmitted by a congregation’s 
collective musical life, rather than an unwavering loyalty to traditions or expectations, can be 
liberating—an invitation to all members of a faith community to find their place in the broader 
story of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and justice.

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17 Westermeyer, *Let Justice Sing*, 105.
Forging Shalom Through Mental Health Justice

Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that “the praxis on which liberation theology reflects is a praxis of solidarity” inspired by the gospel.19 Such work, he concludes, is the work of “peacemakers,” or “those who are forging shalom.”20 However, Gutiérrez notes that the interpretation of the word shalom is more expansive than the common Western translation of “peace.” The Hebrew word shalom refers to the entire scope of our lives and, perhaps more importantly, how we structure our time in the world to establish justice and peace in our churches and communities.21 At some point in our vocation, pastoral musicians will need to consider our role as peacemakers in our communities. Part of this role includes our ability to create a blend of communal song that is “a form of mournful and celebrative shalom that is always greater than the sum of its individual parts.”22

As the Body of Christ, communities of faith hold immense potential to bring people together to create a collective vision of humanity that renews justice and peace for individuals and families affected by the realities of mental illness. This liberating work contributes to the developing concept of mental health justice. I was first introduced to the idea of mental health justice at a W.I.S.E. (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) conference sponsored by the United Church of Christ’s Mental Health Network.23

Sarah Lund, the appointed Minister of Disabilities and Mental Health Justice for the United Christ of Christ, writes openly about complex issues of mental health justice in her own family. Lund recounts events from her childhood where the church, the criminal justice system,

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19 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, xxx.
20 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, xxx.
21 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, xxx.
22 Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing, 98.
23 Note: The UCC Mental Health Network is a denominational organization that promotes mental health justice for individuals and families by working to reduce the stigma of mental illness and inviting people with mental health disorders into the full life, leadership, and work of the church.
and family members denied mental health justice to other relatives facing serious mental illnesses. From her father’s bipolar disorder that led to his estrangement and homelessness, to her brother’s battle with his own serious mental illness, her family suffered relentless injustices not only from individuals and communities, but from the agencies and systems that were supposed to offer them healing and protection. In a poignant memoir style, Lund recalls the tragic story of her cousin, Paul, who from childhood, suffered extensive physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his caretakers, who themselves suffered from mental illness. As a young man, Paul was convicted of the rape and murder of a thirty-six-year-old woman in rural Missouri. At the age of twenty, Paul was sentenced to death, despite his state-appointed attorneys’ best efforts to convince a jury that Paul was “of diminished capacity” and “suffered from a mental disease” at the time of the crime. While Lund does not deny that her cousin was a convicted rapist and murderer, she laments that his entire life was reduced and defined by this singular unfortunate event:

To those ordinary citizens who heard Paul’s testimony, it wasn’t enough that he was the victim of abuse since birth. It didn’t matter to them that a psychologist testified that he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, sexual identity disorder, identity disorder of childhood, borderline personality disorder, and a schizoid personality that resulted from past physical and emotional abuse. It didn’t matter that he was experiencing a psychotic episode at the time he committed the crime. It didn’t matter that the night of the murder, before Paul was arrested, he helped a young woman who was stranded with a flat tire. What mattered to the jury was that Barbara was dead.

Paul undeniably made poor choices in his life that led to his final demise at the hands of the state. His life story, however, also illustrates an example of the denial of mental health justice. As a troubled young person, Paul was not provided appropriate health care to help him learn to manage his mental health disorders. As a convicted murderer, he lived out the rest of his

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24 Lund, *Blessed are the Crazy*, 59.
25 Lund, *Blessed are the Crazy*, 59.
life in a cell on death row instead of having the opportunity to turn his life around through restorative justice measures. It is challenging to separate the concept of mental health justice from the American criminal justice system, especially in recent years as prisons emerged as modern-day asylums. People with mental illness are largely overrepresented within the American prison system and are in fact 4.5 times more likely than members of the general population to be arrested.\(^{26}\) In 2009, the prevalence of mental illness in prisons and jails was three to six times higher than that of the general population, suggesting a relationship between “serious mental illness and incarceration” and “indicating a pseudo-criminalization of illness.”\(^{27}\) Furthermore, people of color, especially African Americans, are 2.1 times more likely to be arrested and 3.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than white people.\(^{28}\) This problem partially stems from the heightened stigma of mental illness within the Black community—including the Black church. African American communities are less equipped to provide quality mental health services and resources to their residents. These disadvantages follow African Americans into the criminal justice system, where they are less likely to be identified as having a significant mental illness and therefore do not receive proper mental health care once incarcerated.\(^{29}\)

When communities, including faith communities, allow people like Paul slip through the cracks of society, the result is often homelessness, substance abuse, institutionalization, incarceration, even suicide. Personal goals and dreams, healthy relationships, and meaningful belonging within a supportive community all fall away as the fight for survival takes over. Mental health justice, therefore, is a broad concept that requires much more than access to better


\(^{27}\) Jenna Bao, “Prisons, the New Asylums.”


\(^{29}\) Leah Pope, “Racial Disparities and Mental Health and Criminal Justice.”
health care, resources, and rehabilitation for people with mental health disorders confined to prisons and jails. To prevent the downfall of people like Paul in the future, it is imperative that faith communities step up and declare themselves agents of liberation and justice on behalf of people with mental health disorders and their families.

Freedom is at the heart of the concept of mental health justice. People with mental health disorders desire the same kinds of freedoms and privileges enjoyed by people who do not live with mental health diagnoses. They want the freedom to love and accept themselves just as they are; to believe that they are people first and foremost and are not defined by their disorders. Rather, their personhood is defined by the knowledge and belief that they are beloved children of God with whom God is well pleased—a kind of belovedness that no level of wellness or illness can diminish. People with mental health disorders want the freedom to thrive, work, worship, and form meaningful relationships with others; the freedom to live in the world without fear of stigma, rejection, or pressure to conform to societal norms of wellness that dictate how they are to speak, behave, and interact with others.

Mental health justice suggests that sharing stories of mental illness with one another leads to freedom. The personal stories of people who live with mental health disorders are worth telling and receiving. In sharing their experiences in safe, compassionate places, people with mental health challenges learn to believe their stories are meaningful not just to others or to their worshipping communities, but to God, whose story of creation and salvation is universal. The sharing of stories is an empowering act of courage on the part of the teller and the listener. The understanding that is gained from sharing the honest narratives of our lives inches us closer to the liberation that springs forth from our individual truths about what it is like to exist in the world with a mental health disorder. As faith communities find the grace to incorporate stories of
mental illness into the story of God’s love and justice for all of creation, they begin to carve out spaces of healing and belonging for individuals and families for whom the challenges of mental illness are an everyday reality.

When faith communities honor and validate the lived experiences of people with mental health disorders, mental health justice prevails. When faith communities actively include people with mental health disorders into the collective life of the gathered people of God, mental health justice prevails. When faith communities gracefully respond to the realities of those lives affected by mental health disorders without judgment or bias, mental health justice prevails. When faith communities commit themselves to walking alongside people with mental health disorders through their journeys of chronic illness, mental health justice prevails. When faith communities lovingly and respectfully engage with people living with mental health disorders and their families, mental health justice prevails as individuals and families experience healing, cultivate meaningful human connections, and access the freedom to exist as one’s authentic self—free to live into the fullness of life that God provides despite their mental health diagnoses.

**Breaking the Silence of Mental Illness in Communities of Faith**

The twenty-first century church, its pastoral leadership, and laity-led ministries continue to consider and define their role in the work liberation and justice as these concepts apply to people with mental illness. Communities of faith require a “prophetic wake-up call” from time to time to rouse it from its “lethargy and disobedience.”

How, then, do we as God’s people reconcile the ways in which we keep people with mental illness marginalized and invisible with the radical teachings of Jesus that exemplify unconditional love and compassion? Creating a culture of

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mental health justice within our faith communities is possible; the gospel provides us with ways in which we are to love our neighbors as Christ loved us. As Lund reminds us, “there is no love without justice. When it comes to matters of faith, justice is an important ingredient in God’s love. Justice ensures equal access to opportunities to flourish as children of God.”

Faith communities desiring to delve deeper into God’s love and justice can begin by breaking the silence around mental illness. This is the calling and responsibility of every member of the faith community, not just pastoral leadership, staff, or lay leadership. When stories of mental illness are spoken out loud, the grip of guilt, shame, and fear loosens from within and allows the fullness of one’s humanity to be seen and loved. By expressing these truths in community with each other, people begin to heal and break through the lonely silence that is a significant part of the experience of mental illness. Singing about the hidden stories of mental illness is one way these truths are broken open and shared; pastoral musicians are in a precise position to help facilitate these moments in liturgical contexts.

**Breaking the Silence Through Congregational Song**

The act of congregational singing serves numerous functions within the context of corporate worship, including the breaking of the “tyranny of silence” around issues of liberation and justice that faith communities failed to voice in the past. “A just society,” observes Westermeyer, “is a healthy society. It will sing. Healthy individuals will sing, not only alone, but with one another.” The church is unusual in that it is one of the few remaining institutions, aside from

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34 Westermeyer, *Let Justice Sing*, 97.  
35 Westermeyer, *Let Justice Sing*, 98.
sporting events, bars, and birthday parties, where group singing is still practiced on a regular basis. A faith community’s musical tapestry of hymn and song repertoire ultimately indicates the overall health and vitality of that community.36

The body of hymnody within a gathered worshipping community is an identifying factor of that community. The hymns and songs a community sings together on a regular basis tells a story of the people in that community—where they have been, who they are, and where they believe God is leading them along their journey of faith. Hymns are poetic, musical, and theological reflections that support the heritage and future hopes of the faith community. They play a significant role in the formation of our Christian beliefs—sometimes more so than the Sunday morning homily or weeknight Bible study.37 In addition to their use in corporate worship, hymns also play a role in Christian education, evangelism, and other ministries.38 Within the liturgy, they afford congregations the opportunity to collectively affirm their faith—teaching us truths about ourselves, our relationships with others, and with the creator.39 Early encounters with scripture and exposure to the life and teachings of Jesus are often introduced to us through the hymns and songs we sang as young people at summer camps or vacation Bible school. It is through hymnody—and the act of singing together—that we acquire the language to express ourselves as individuals and as members of the Body of Christ. Regular participation in the singing of hymns and songs of the faithful enable us to articulate to the divine statements of praise and adoration, thanksgiving and prayer, confession and forgiveness, awe and wonder, and sorrow and lament.

38 Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 64.
39 Eskew and McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 64.
**Hymn Writers Address Social Justice Issues: Ruth Duck**

Hymnody, God’s “incredible gift of sound,” provides the church with opportunities to voice and reflect upon its role in the “social fabric at a deep level,” acting as a kind of barometer for the issues that are of utmost importance and concern to a faith community.⁴⁰ A faith community’s social divisions are therefore often reflected in its musical divisions.⁴¹ Hymn writers of today are choosing to directly address these social divisions in their work. One example is Ruth Duck’s 2020 hymn text entitled “Sing of the ones who died too soon.”

Sing of the ones who died too soon;
in love lift up their names.
They live in tears and vivid dreams,
in grief and gratitude.
They dwell within the heart of God.
Sing glory hallelujah.

Sing of the ones struck down in hate;
in witness say their names
Sing out for justice and respect,
for all who live and breathe.
Our God still lives in hearts who love.
Sing glory hallelujah.

Sing of the ones who live and grieve;
in prayer lift up their names,
that they find peace as time flows by,
though pain may still endure.
We hold them in our hearts with love.
Sing glory hallelujah.

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⁴⁰ Westermeyer, *Let Justice Sing*, 98.
⁴¹ Westermeyer, *Let Justice Sing*, 27
Giver of life beyond all death,  
great hope beyond all fear,  
we call your name, we seek you now,  
for you have been our help.  
We dwell within your heart of love.  
Sing glory hallelujah.  

In this text, we see how the act of corporate singing draws a congregation’s attention toward particular social issues with which communities of faith continue to wrestle. In these instances, hymnody nudges us closer to the peace, unity, and justice the church seeks. Each stanza of Duck’s text is a declaration of the sacredness of all life and a call for reflection and change within the Body of Christ. In the first stanza, we “lift up” in song those whose lives were taken from us: “Sing of the ones who died too soon; / in love lift up their names.” Stanza two is a call for society to change the systems that allow hate to overshadow God’s justice: “Sing of the ones struck down in hate; / in witness say their names.” The phrase “say their names” is a purposeful choice of words for our time. In recent years, especially after the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on May 25, 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement continues its attempts to pierce through the dividing walls of systemic racism, police brutality, and palpable injustices.

“Say their names” arises as a battle cry from the disenfranchised voices of the Black community who demand to be seen and heard as equal members of American society. However, for those of us outside of the Black community, “say their names” is a phrase that calls us to action. We must continue to say their names not only as an act of holy remembrance and lament for those Black lives that ended too soon, but as a verbal token of all the work we as a people of

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God have yet to accomplish in the interest of bringing God’s peace and liberation to those living under the weight of violence, oppression, and racial injustice. Contained in the third stanza is a reference to those who are left behind to grieve their losses: “though pain may still endure, / We hold them in our hearts with love.” The last stanza is a petitionary prayer to God to help us remember what hope feels like and where it comes from: “Giver of life beyond all death, / great hope beyond all fear, / we call your name, we seek you now, / for you have been our help.” The music we sing together, therefore, carries enormous implications for our life together including the church’s ongoing mission to advocate for issues of justice, including mental health justice.43

Hymn Writers Address Mental Health Justice Issues: Dan Damon

United Methodist pastor, musician, and hymn writer Dan Damon agrees that the church’s song is a valuable method for congregations to learn and grapple with issues of justice. Through his own writing, ministry, and advocacy, Damon encourages pastoral musicians to dig deeper to locate hymns and songs that “lead, support, and inspire their people in singing toward justice,” for too many musicians remain unaware of the impact their musical decisions can have on a community’s commitment to civic life and culture.44 A prolific hymn writer, Damon feels a responsibility to create hymn texts that refer to specific topics of justice, such as creation and the environment, women, children, the elderly and aging, people in the LGBTQIA+ community,45 the differently abled, the poor and oppressed, racial inequality, mental illness, displaced peoples and refugees, and victims of human trafficking—topics and themes which are either fewer in

43 Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing, 27.
45 Note: While the term LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transexual, questioning/queer, intersex, ally, etc.) includes many variations, this abbreviation is used so to be as inclusive as possible when referring to our friends and neighbors in the gay community.
number or entirely absent from most twentieth-century hymnals found in worshipping congregations of today.⁴⁶

Damon concludes that hymnody orients people toward issues of justice by simply singing about them. If provided with a strong text and a solid, accessible melody, God’s people will sing. The act of singing together opens a space within the heart of the worshipping assembly by addressing difficult truths about oppression, prejudice, and diversity, inviting these difficult topics out of the shadows and into the realm of thoughtful theological discourse.⁴⁷ The hymnological resources needed to provide congregations with a deeper sense of social awareness and justice are currently underdeveloped and therefore challenging to find. Pastoral musicians must forge ahead to unearth or event create new hymn texts and other liturgical resources to strengthen the relationship between social justice issues and the faith communities whose calling it is to be active agents of liberation.

Communities of faith committed to breaking the silence around mental illness will sing hymn texts that articulate mental health issues and advocate for mental health justice. Damon’s 2017 hymn, “God, help your church to learn,” is a call to the church to embrace people whose life circumstances we do not necessarily understand.

God, help your church to learn
our fear gives no permission
to blame those with a troubled mind,
or view them with suspicion.

God, help your church to see
despair knows only bleakness,
and help us try to understand
distress is not a weakness.

⁴⁶ Nancy E. Hall: “Singing our way to justice,” 405.
⁴⁷ Nancy E. Hall: “Singing our way to justice,” 408.
God, help your church to pray
that those with silent sadness
will know there is no shame to bear
for loss of peace or gladness.

God, help your church to say:
there is no need for hiding;
so all may find a refuge here,
and love of God abiding.\(^\text{48}\)

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This hymn suggests that as faith communities begin to “learn,” “see,” “pray,” and speak (“say”) for those struggling with “troubled minds,” “distress,” and “silent sadness,” God’s people will begin to see those with mental illness as people worthy of refuge and belonging. Damon’s text helps us remember that harboring hesitations or fears regarding people who are different than us does not give us permission to “view them with suspicion.” Rather, if we ask God to help us see beyond a person’s diagnosis, we will find more understanding and compassion for those who live with constant sadness and despair. In his last stanza, Damon provides faith communities with specific instructions for how they can welcome those who desperately need measures of God’s loving-kindness: “God, help your church to say: / there is no need for hiding; / so all may find refuge here, / and love of God abiding.”

**Hymn Writers Address Harsh Realities of Mental Illness: Edith Sinclair Downing**

Hymn writer Edith Sinclair Downing also wrote a painfully poignant hymn called “Where is the light when darkness falls” that concerns another reality of mental illness—suicide.

Where is the light when darkness falls
and courage drips away?
Where is the voice to answer them
when no words come to pray?

Run as they did in search of life,
the enemy devoured
the hope and simple trust they had,
and left them, fearful, cowered.

They climbed so high, yet fell so low—
abandoned, lost, alone.
They felt that they must end their life
to find at last their home.

God, help us stand beside our friends,
and never hesitate
to sense their need and offer help
before it is too late!49
© 2009 Wayne Leupold Editions, Inc., Colfax, NC.

In this hymn, Downing suggests that mental illness is a condition of loneliness, leaving its sufferers anxiously in search of the light as their courage to live “drips away.” Using words such as “fearful,” “cowered,” “abandoned,” and “lost,” Downing verbally unearths the experience of mental illness, which culminates in the third stanza as the subject succumbs to death by her own choosing in order to find the peace that eluded her in life: “They climbed so high, yet fell so low / abandoned, lost, alone. / They felt that they must end their life / to find at last their home.” The final stanza is yet another charge to the gathered people of God to learn to recognize this kind of distress in individuals so that—without hesitation—faith communities can “sense their need and offer help / before it is too late!”50

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Case Study: Christ the King Lutheran Church Tackles Loneliness and Isolation Through Community Ministry Grant

Behind a faith community’s hymn and song inventory is the pastoral musician charged with making these necessary musical choices on behalf of the faith community she serves. In some denominations, pastoral leadership selects the hymns to be sung on any given Sunday. In other traditions, the pastor and the musician make these choices together. In the Lutheran tradition from which I come, the task of hymn selection falls in the lap of the music director. The finest, most thoughtful pastoral musicians understand that their musical choices matter deeply—not just to the faith community, but to the neighboring communities with whom the church shares its geography. Part of the responsibility of the pastoral musician is to get to know the people that comprise her surrounding community—to understand the issues and concerns that matter to them, to learn what kinds of effects these issues have on individuals and families within that community, and to help the community decipher for itself a vision for its future. The knowledge we acquire from acquainting ourselves with our community informs and reforms our musical choices. Another task for the pastoral musician then becomes to untangle and use this information to locate hymns and other music that tell the stories of that community, thereby providing the community with the musical means to collectively express their deepest joys and concerns to one another and to God.

In recent years, I had the opportunity to restructure my musical choices in ways that tell the story of my community with more accuracy and authenticity. This process began when members of my congregation in South Bend, including members of the church staff, engaged in conversation with the people and businesses in and around our neighborhood. This action was

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51 Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing, 98.
largely inspired by a Community Ministry Grant application we were completing for the Center for Congregations—a religious organization in Indianapolis that offers Indiana congregations no-cost consulting services, low-cost educational events, workshops, and resources, in addition to generous grants.\(^52\) Issues raised amid these conversations included concerns regarding children’s hunger insecurities and the vulnerabilities of ageing and elderly populations. By the end of this process, we noticed two distinctive reoccurring themes running throughout these community-driven conversations—many of our neighbors feel lonely and isolated.

I associate words such as “lonely” and “isolated” with mental illness. I often describe my own experience of mental illness as a disease of loneliness. According to Mental Health America, the nation’s leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness, “loneliness has been associated with a number of poor mental health outcomes,” including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and certain kinds of psychosis.\(^53\) Feelings of loneliness are a result of social isolation—a common tendency for people struggling with depression—and combine in ways that create self-perpetuating cycles, where the presence of symptoms “limit connections and support, which leads to the loss of those supports as protective factors, which may increase symptoms, and so on.”\(^54\)

The information provided to us by these neighborhood conversations meant that our congregation needed to make a series of decisions: What were we to do with this information? Would it be enough to commit ourselves to pray for those in our community whose lives were affected by loneliness and isolation, or should we find ways to act? If so, what would these actionable steps look like? Would they take the shape of new community ministries and

\(^54\) “Is Loneliness Making My Mental Health Struggles Harder?”
programming, changes to our current music and worship practices, a renewed effort to educate
the congregation about the concerns of the community, or all of the above? I did not know the
answers, in fact, none of us did, but what I did know is that I wanted to be a part of the team
dedicated to tackling these questions to reveal a new way to be the church in our community. In
the summer of 2019, I formally joined the Community Ministry Grant (CMG) Team at Christ the
King Lutheran Church.

The CMG Team gathered monthly to discuss what kinds of new ministries might be a
good fit for our congregation and surrounding community. After many months of these
conversations, we arrived at a conclusion that would guide our decision making for the next
several months. Together, the CMG Team decided that Christ the King Lutheran Church would
be a place where people could ask hard questions about faith, God, and issues of mental illness
and grief—two long-recognized causes of loneliness and isolation. We also acknowledged the
existential value and the inherent symbolism behind the act of sharing meals. People create and
cultivate meaningful relationships when dining together. When we gather for a meal,
conversations are sparked, stories are shared, laughter and tears flow, and in doing so, we open
ourselves to the possibility of being more fully known and fully loved by each other and by God.
The CMG Team also believed that inviting members of the congregation and community
together for these kinds of experiences would help to lessen the burden of loneliness and
isolation that so many of our neighbors spoke to us about. As we put the finishing touches on our
grant application, we presented our intention to form a series of community ministries whose
purpose would be to create a space at Christ the King where people could find meaningful
connections with one another over a meal.55

In November 2019, Christ the King Lutheran Church was awarded a $30,000 matching grant from the Center for Congregations to help us carry out our vision for how to bring people out of their loneliness and isolation and into opportunities for meaningful connection. The components of the grant took shape in four distinct approaches: the formation of two weekly support groups (*Fresh Hope for Mental Health* and GriefShare), community programming intended especially for senior citizens (Second Half Adventures), upgrades to the church kitchen to better equip us to prepare and serve community meals, and the hiring of a consultant to help us affectively implement these new ministries by guiding us through the practice of “community Eucharist.”

As these CMG-funded ministries formed and developed, I began to sense a shift in my approach to music ministry. I considered the long-term effects of music on a congregation’s overall wellbeing, especially as applied to people with mental health disorders and their loved ones. Music, widely known for its healing properties, lowers blood pressure, reduces pain in palliative care, improves sleep, alleviates allergies, boosts immune function, and reduces depression. I therefore began to look for ways to incorporate music into the new ministries funded by the Community Ministry Grant. I led the singing of Christmas carols for a Second Half Adventures luncheon. When we could not offer our annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope in October 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, I collaborated with local mental health professionals to create a video series to spread awareness about National Mental Health Awareness Week. The series included five videos that featured a different CMG-related ministry.

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56 “CtK core project purpose: to be a place where people can become meaningfully connected with others over a meal,” [https://www.ctkluth.com/uploads/1/2/2/1/122136102/cmg_follow_up.jpg](https://www.ctkluth.com/uploads/1/2/2/1/122136102/cmg_follow_up.jpg) (accessed March 19, 2021).
or other community resource. The last segment of each video concluded with a hymn or song that encapsulated the day’s topic, intended to leave the viewer with a sense of hope.\(^ {58}\) I also initiated a short service of evening prayer for healing on Tuesday evenings before \textit{Fresh Hope for Mental Health} gathered for its weekly support group meetings. Participants of \textit{Fresh Hope} were highly encouraged to attend, but congregation and community members were also welcomed.

At the time of this writing, the ministries created and supported by CMG funds to offer meaningful connections over a meal have been up and running for over two years. When COVID-19 forced us to shut down all in-person gatherings in the church building, we quickly adapted and offered most of our programming virtually via Zoom. The meal portion of our mission statement was put on hold for health and safety reasons since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The church kitchen, now fully renovated, will be ready to offer our community meaningful connections over a meal as intended by the grant once the pandemic is behind us.

This CMG process changed us as a church staff and a congregation by widening our lens through which we see and understand community ministry. I also realize that this process changed me—both in my philosophy of church music and in my role as a pastoral musician—in ways that strengthened my ministry of music and clarified my understanding of my vocation. Through my involvement in other community ministries that stretched me beyond my ministry of music, I heard peoples’ stories of suffering and loss. I sat with others as they attempted to make sense of their lives through anger and tears. I prayed and sang with and on behalf of others struggling with uncertainty and hopelessness. I understood that the Holy Spirit was opening my eyes, leading me into a deeper understanding of who I was, who I am, and who I am becoming—

both personally and professionally. I now consider myself a pastoral musician who is developing a deeper sense of the pastoral dimensions of my vocation. Making music with others in my community of faith is the means through which I engage in certain theological tasks of liberation: to usher hidden voices out of the shadows into places of belonging, to help heal the brokenhearted while empowering them to tell their stories, and to guide my community of faith toward a more profound awareness of issues of mental health justice.

The Pastoral Musician as Wounded Healer

In the wise words of Father Henri Nouwen, “nothing can be written about ministry without a deeper understanding of the ways in which the minister can make his own wounds available as a source of healing.”⁵⁹ As pastoral musicians, we perform our jobs under the gaze of the public eye on a weekly basis. No matter the state of our personal lives at any given moment, our vocation calls us to teach, lead, and facilitate rehearsals and worship services on behalf of others in service of Christ’s church with grace and humility. Those of us in positions of church leadership possess fears, doubts, and insecurities. We awkwardly stumble through the stresses, challenges, and demands of daily life. We grow weary, exhausted, and overwhelmed. We drag the burdens of our humanity around with us, often letting them spill over into our interactions with others. Sometimes, our circumstances leave us openly wounded and on display, and we yearn for the same kind of comfort and healing that we strive to provide to others through our ministry.

Many years ago, when I was first diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety, I made a conscious choice to speak and write openly about the realities of my struggles with mental health.

illness. My depression left me feeling defeated and alone, yet, aware of the prevalence of mental illness in this country and in my own community, I knew that many other people also struggled to define their place on the spectrum of illness and wellness. I shared my story as honestly as I could with as many audiences as I could find. I blogged and I posted. I was interviewed by the local news about a new treatment I was undergoing for my depression called Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, or TMS.\textsuperscript{60} I offered presentations to local college students about how to recognize the onset of a mental health disorder and where they could access help and resources. I led national workshops that encouraged fellow pastoral musicians to consider how the painful realities of living with a chronic, often unpredictable mental illness can be addressed with tenderness and compassion through our ministries of music.

As my journey continued, I began to understand and believe that not only should we talk about mental illness as a faith community, but we should also lift up this topic in song. This, too, became a deliberate choice. I searched for new hymns and songs that spoke to the presence and acceptance of mental health challenges in the church, many times writing my own material to fit a particular context or event. With the help and support of my colleagues at Christ the King, I crafted liturgies that brought these issues into the light and love of God’s embrace, including an Annual Blue Christmas service (sometimes known as a Longest Night service), an Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope in honor of National Mental Health Awareness Week, and multiple liturgies created in honor of Mental Health Awareness Sunday. All this time, God gently showed me how my suffering was not wasted or without purpose. Through my own experiences with the hopelessness and despair that mental illness brought to my life, I now understood that I could

\textsuperscript{60} To watch this interview, visit: Maureen McFadden, “Magnets offer hope for major depression; study underway with youth,” 16 News Now: WNDU (posted September 21, 2016), https://www.wndu.com/content/news/Magnets-offer-hope-to-those-with-Major-Depression--394307101.html
help other people make sense of their own pain and uncover how they might use these difficult experiences for good in the world. I realized that Father Nouwen’s words were becoming my new reality: I am a wounded healer. I am renewed by the understanding that my musical choices are also theological choices that affect how people see themselves and the world around them. I will make these choices with the knowledge that they possess the potential to bring healing to individuals, to families, and to my community of faith.

As Christians, the event of Christ’s painful suffering and death is a crucial component of the Christian story and carries powerful implications for the understanding of our own pain, suffering, and even disability. In our humanness, we question the necessity of our painful experiences: Why me? Why this? Why now? Jesus, in his humanness, asked similar questions of his Father before he gave up his own life, but ultimately, he ran directly into the darkness of death for the life of the world, emerging from the tomb fully alive yet marked with permanent scars of suffering. None of the pain and suffering Jesus endured on the cross was ever wasted; our very lives are tangible evidence of this. As writer and disability advocate Nancy Eiesland reminds us, Christ’s broken body made life possible for the entirety of creation. What are we to learn from the pain and suffering of the cross, and where does it fit on the path toward liberation and mental health justice? Pain, suffering, and the presence of our brokenness are essential components of the entire story of God’s love for us; they are therefore necessary parts of our story, too.

Many of us go to great lengths to avoid pain, running from the people and circumstances in our lives that cause us to suffer. People naturally hold faith communities and their leadership to higher moral and behavioral standards than they do members of the general population, yet those of us that serve these communities possess the same inclination to avoid pain and suffering
at all costs. Pastoral musicians, through their roles in church leadership, must be willing to examine and expose their own pain and suffering in order to cultivate a sacred space within their ministries where people can connect with and express their own sorrow and lament. When the church listens to the direction of the Holy Spirit, it will express the entirety of its story in congregational singing and embrace all parts of its history. In doing so, God’s people begin to understand that the darkness and the light can exist together; that the joy and thanksgiving of doxology and the pain and suffering of lament are both essential elements of the full experience of our Christian lives together.

While it is often painful, I recognize the importance of keeping my own wounds open just enough to let others see and understand that being wounded does not mean that we are weak, broken, or hopeless. This why I took the risk to talk openly about my experience in a psychiatric hospital with my congregation. I confided in others when certain medications stopped working and threw me back into depressive episodes. While these stories are colored by feelings of embarrassment, disappointment, and even shame, I continue to share them because I understand that my brokenness remains a channel through which my ministry of music takes shape and forms healing connections with others. Together, our brokenness becomes the very thing that invites others into that mysterious and holy space where the gospel shatters our hearts of stone and breaks us open to the magnificent love of God.

Congregational song invites us to sing our entire stories, and in doing so, the church develops, refines, and shares its prophetic voice. While our stories are expressed through songs of praise, thanksgiving, and adoration, the songs that tell our stories of sadness, loss, and

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61 Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing, 100.
62 Saliers, Music, Theology, and Justice, 205.
63 Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing, 99.
64 Westermeyer, Let Justice Sing, 102.
disappointment, however, are sung less often—sometimes, not at all. If the church’s song teaches us how to sow seeds peace, liberation, and justice into the sacred landscape of our life in Christ, the following chapter explores how congregational song also helps us wrestle with the more difficult, painful parts of our stories through the ancient practice of singing our collective lament.
CHAPTER 4:
REINVIGORATING THE PRACTICE OF LAMENT TO EXPRESS THE ENTIRETY OF OUR STORIES

“People have said “Don’t cry” to other people for years and years, and all it has ever meant is “I’m too uncomfortable when you show your feelings: don’t cry.” I’d rather have then say “Go ahead and cry. I’m here to be with you.”

–Fred Rogers¹

Lament – Can We Really Talk to God Like That?

Lament is an ancient Hebrew worship practice that enables God’s people to name and grieve their individual pain, abide with each other in solidarity as a gathered community of faith, and cry out for liberation and justice alongside their oppressed and marginalized neighbors. It assumes an essential role in corporate Christian worship, taking its place alongside confession, praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. Lament is a specific form of prayer passed down to us from our Jewish brothers and sisters—faithful people who openly wept and moaned before God as they demanded deliverance from their trials in the wilderness as they longed for a “land flowing with milk and honey.”²

Author and United Methodist pastor Abby Norman encourages individuals and faith communities to uncover and reclaim the transformative power of lamenting before God.

“Lament is hard. Lament is gritty. Lament doesn’t hold back,” she acknowledges. It serves no one—not ourselves, our families, or our communities—when we repress our complicated emotions and experiences. “We need to be able to vocalize when people are being treated

¹ Fred Rogers, You Are Special: Neighborly Words of Wisdom from Mister Rogers (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 120.
² Exodus 3:7 (NRSV will be used throughout).
unfairly or when we are hurting,” Norman continues. “The place for that should be in prayer. The place for that should be in how we talk to God. The place for that should be the church.”

The practice of lamentation fell out of fashion in many modern-day faith communities. As theologian Don Saliers observes, “At the very time when most of us are saturated by news of human carnage, multiple enmities, and grievous suffering our liturgies largely avoid or simply neglect lamentation and complaint as modes of prayer.” Regardless of its current state of neglect in today’s worshipping communities, to engage in lament is not indicative of a lack of faith, poor restraint, or sentimentality. Instead, lament provides us with a language to articulate the confusion and disappointment we encounter as we try to comprehend the gap between the reality of world as it contrasts with the world that God intended for creation. Try as we might, there is no language too colorful or emotion too bottomless that God would ever turn away from us. God lives up to the namesake with which he entered our humanity: Emmanuel, meaning *God with us*. While we question and plead for answers; as we reluctantly surrender to moments of acceptance; as our broken hearts cry out for healing, God is with us. The Psalmist also reminds us of God’s abiding presence:

I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.  
Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.  
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.  
The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.

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5 Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 11.  
6 Matthew 1:23.  
When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.⁸

Over the course of this chapter, I will briefly delve into the biblical history of the psalms and their use in the worship practices of the early Christian church. We will examine the characteristics of the lament psalms considering Walter Brueggemann’s classification system of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation, followed by a personal narrative that illustrates how this same pattern manifests in mental health conditions. This will be followed by an assessment of the general use of lament in present-day faith communities and a consideration of what is at stake if we do not meaningfully engage in lament as a people of God. Finally, I will propose how a communal renewal of lament is significant not only for people who live with mental health problems, but for all people who believe in a merciful, compassionate God who longs to know us intimately and loves us eternally—despite our humanity.

Psalm Singing and the Early Christian Church

While singing was an integral part of the early Christian church, the origins of early Christian musical practices are still widely debated by scholars. We know that the earliest gathered communities of faith sang together, but musical notation and knowledge of performance practice from this period of history remain unknown to us. However, the influence of Greco-Roman traditions for community gatherings, referred to as symposia, undoubtedly played a part in the formation of the early Christian assembly.⁹ Singing was a common element of the Hellenistic

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⁸ Psalm 34:4–6, 15, 17–18.
banquet and served as expressions of piety, entertainment, or both. These practices were later transferred into ritualistic Jewish temple and synagogue worship.

In early Christian gatherings, the connection between singing and a shared meal were solidified through the celebration of the Eucharist. These gatherings featured the singing of scriptural texts, including the psalter. Historical literary accounts of such gatherings report that a leader and the assembly took turns singing the psalms as hymns to God either during or at the close of a community meal; the leader sang the verses while the assembly chanted the closing lines, or the refrain, of the psalm, while at other times, the formation of two choirs allowed for antiphonal singing. According to the writings of prolific early Christian writer, Tertullian, by the end of the second century, psalm singing was a common occurrence during Christian gatherings. The assembly sang psalms in a responsorial fashion, meaning that a leader would chant the psalm verses while the gathered community responded with a chanted refrain. We can therefore infer that because the psalter was such an important feature of Jewish, and later, early Christian worship, the earliest Christian communities were acquainted with psalms of lament.

**Understanding the Form and Function of the Psalms**

The psalms are a written record of Israel’s attempt to tell the story of its survival and its transformation as a people of God. Historically, theologians and scholars conceived ways to comprehend the theological meaning, literary structure, and thematic organization of the

psalms—from John Calvin and Martin Luther to figures like Hermann Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel, and Claus Westermann. Contemporary theologian and scholar Walter Brueggemann devised a postcritical approach to understanding the rhythm and character of the psalms that encompass three distinct thematic categories: psalms of orientation, psalms of disorientation, and psalms of new orientation. Brueggemann’s model bridges the critical study of the psalms with the realities of life in ancient Israel, which aptly applies to the contemporary ebb and flow of the modern human experience.

In the following subsections, the left column features the original psalm text as it appears in the New Revised Standard Version. The column on the right features a paraphrase of the same text by various hymn writers. In comparing the two text settings side by side, one can note the differences between the original scriptural version and the poetic nuance of the paraphrased metrical psalmody.

**Psalms of Orientation**

Characterized by accounts of gratitude, blessing, and well-being, psalms of orientation articulate the feelings of joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God, God’s creation, and God’s law. They reflect a life of faith marked by a confidence in God’s goodness and the sense that God is reliable and trustworthy. Psalms of orientation do not report events, happenings, or intrusions, but rather, reveal a contentment about a world that seemingly contains no surprises or fears. Within this strata of the psalms Brueggemann includes:

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a. Songs of Creation, or celebrations of God’s reliability, equity, and generosity.¹⁹

Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers,
fore and flame your ministers.

You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

Psalm 104:1–15

b. Songs of Torah, or a collection of moral values with a focus on God’s will, structure, and purpose for everyday life.²⁰

O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?
Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be moved.
Psalm 15

LORD, who may dwell within your house or on your holy hill?
Those who do good and speak the truth, whose lives are blameless still; who have no guile upon their tongues nor harm their neighbor’s life, but honor those who fear the LORD and turn away from strife; who do no wrong, but keep their word and seek no bribe or gain; all those who do such things shall live and safe from harm remain.

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How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed;” my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 13

²⁰ Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 38.
²¹ Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 42.

c. Wisdom Psalms, or psalms that express a reliable God at work in the world.²¹
d. Songs of Retribution, or psalms that acknowledge the moral symmetry of God’s world in relation with the consequences of human action.\(^{22}\)

Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments. Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

How blest are those who fear the LORD and greatly love God’s holy will. Their children share their great reward, and blessings all their days shall fill.

Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

Abounding wealth shall bless their home, their righteousness fore’er endure. To them shall light arise in gloom, for they are merciful and pure.

It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.

The people who befriend the weak in justice shall their cause maintain. True peace shall their whole life attend, and long their memory shall remain.

They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD. Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

By evil tidings not dismayed, the righteous trust in God alone. Their heart is steadfast, unafraid, for they shall see their foes o’erthrown.

They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor.

Dispersing gifts among the poor, the righteous for their needs provide. Their righteousness shall thus endure; their strength in honor shall abide.

The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

The wicked will be brought to shame, while righteous ones will see the LORD. Unrighteous hopes will not see gain, for sin will find its due reward.

Psalm 112

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\(^{22}\) Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 45.
How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

Psalm 133

How good it is when brothers dwell in peace
with one another:
it is like precious oil when running fresh on
Aaron’s beard.

How good it is when sisters dwell in peace
with one another:
fresh like the morning dew that falls on Zion’s
holy hill.

How good it is when all earth’s people dwell
in peace together:
there is where God will pour the blessing, life
forevermore.

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Psalms of Disorientation

Almost forty percent of the book of psalms are psalms of disorientation, also known as psalms of lament. Additional biblical literature, such as the book of Job, Lamentations, and Jeremiah, points to other human stories and experiences steeped in the language of lament. Lament, which comprises a third of the Bible, sharpens our focus on the common tensions and contradictions of being alive in today’s world and gives them an authentic voice. A hallmark of the human experience is the navigation of complicated and often opposite emotions concurrently. We hate though we love. We weep though we rejoice. We despair though we hope. Lament, especially as modeled in psalms of disorientation, helps us develop the skills to engage in these dense,

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25 Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 3.
intricate feelings without succumbing to their overwhelming complexity. Through the practice of lament, we discover that we can still praise in the midst of pain, hope in loss, and find a song to sing in darkness.

Psalms of disorientation are notable for the distinctive ways in which they address the challenges of our everyday lives. They are the sentiments we express to God that do not fall into the categories of praise or gratitude; they are the utterances we offer when everything is just too difficult.26 Psalms of disorientation challenge our deeply held notions about the world and our place in it, our faith, and God’s agency over it all. While faith communities are more comfortable singing hymns and songs of “equilibrium, coherence, and symmetry,” Brueggemann justifiably claims that life rarely plays out as such, but rather, is “savagely marked by disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry.”27

Psalm 22 exemplifies a psalm of disorientation that incorporates the disequilibrium, incoherence, and asymmetry of the human experience to which Brueggemann refers. An essential component of the Good Friday liturgy, Psalm 22 is a prayer from an individual to God during an immense period of suffering in anticipation of death. It begins with a phrase that Jesus later cries out to his Father from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”28

The next several verses continue in this same vein of personal distress:

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.
But I am a worm, and not human;
    scorned by others, and despised by the people.
All who see me mock at me;
    they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
“ Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—
    let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”29

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26 Norman, You Can Talk to God Like That, 18.
27 Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 51.
29 Psalm 22:1b–2, 6–8.
The psalmist, whose suffering reduces him to a status lower than humanity, momentarily bursts into a song of praise and thanksgiving while still in the woeful grip of his misery: “Yet it was you who took me from my mother’s womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.” He then snaps back into the harsh reality of his present suffering, as he describes in terrifying detail:

Many bulls encircle me,
   strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
   like a ravening and roaring lion.
I am poured out like water,
   and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
   it is melted within my breast;
my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
   and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs are all around me;
   a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
I can count all my bones.  

This grim account propels the psalmist into one final impassioned petition to God for deliverance: “But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion!”

Throughout Psalm 22, the nature of the psalmist’s suffering is unclear; we cannot be certain whether his maladies stem from physical or emotional pain. Whatever the source of his torment, a striking shift in the psalmist’s tone occurs in the middle of verse twenty-one: “From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me,” he suddenly exclaims. “I will tell of your name

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³¹ Psalm 22:12–17a.
to my brothers and sisters; in the middle of the congregation I will praise you.”

For a few moments, it is as if the clouds part just enough for the psalmist to shed light on God’s saving actions, which allows him to recall the promises of God. “For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.”

Such hopeful recollection thrusts the psalmist into a posture of exuberant praise and adoration in anticipation of God’s deliverance for years to come:

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the LORD,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

In faith communities of today, the authentic expression of psalms of disorientation, while allowing us to name and voice our innermost pain, anguish, and suffering before God, are highly stigmatized; they elicit a sense of guilt, disloyalty, negativity, and shame. Yes, they are a part of the three-year lectionary cycle, but we do not linger for too long in their brazen honesty regarding the human experience. In western culture, public displays of personal suffering—whether inside or outside of faith communities—are not looked upon with empathy and compassion, but with disdain and judgment. We ignore the homeless population on busy street corners, assuming that our charity will only perpetuate their addictions and other vices. We walk a little quicker to avoid persons in the park mumbling incoherently to themselves. We shake our

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heads in disapproval at individuals on the rebound from community clinics, rehabilitation programs, and the prison system. Yet we, like them, are equally susceptible to misery and suffering, albeit the differences between the suffering of the upper to upper-middle classes in comparison to the lower-middle and working classes are undeniably palpable. Unequal access to resources such as education, healthcare, and other benefits continues to widen the gap between the upper and lower echelons of society. The appearance of suffering, therefore, may look very different from one person to another, yet the reality that we must all endure such suffering is a factor that connects us more than it divides us. Cultivating this kind of connection is especially challenging, however, when we are culturally conditioned to behave in socially acceptable ways that leave no room for us to express the realities of how we are actually feeling. We are instructed to wear a smile in public, to perform as if nothing bothers us, and to keep our pain private.

Over the course of the story of the Christian church, worshipping communities that cried out to God in lament were labeled as unfaithful. According to Brueggemann, when the psalms are employed as instruments of lament, they are subject to judgment by outsiders as acts of unfaith and failure, but for the community itself, lament is an act of faith that emboldens and transforms their lives. Norman hints at the transformative capability of lament when she writes of the various circles that develop within solid communities whose mission it is to love and serve their neighbor. Within these circles, there is a constant, willing exchange of suffering and release between the community and the individual or group that needs a place to express their anguish. “When we are with people, their struggles begin to matter to us,” she writes. “We

38 Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 101.
cannot care about everything, and we certainly can’t do everything about every problem we encounter. But we can deeply impact those around us by crying out on their behalf, by lamenting the ways that our neighbors are not cared for, and by encouraging our government to take care of the least of these.”

Our ability to lament with each other therefore slowly chips away at our western ideals of staunch individualism and encourages us to seek relief from what ails us together. In abiding with one another along the unpredictable detours of our lives, we bless one another, so that on our journeys to the other side of our pain, at least we know that we do not have to climb every mountain or pass through every valley alone.

**Psalms of New Orientation**

This pathway to the “other side,” or what Brueggemann refers to as psalms of new orientation, is lined with surprises and moments of gratitude, acceptance, and transformation, bearing witness to the power and mercy of God to unexpectedly cultivate new growth out of lifelessness. This new orientation is not a return to familiar feelings of stability, for there is no backward movement when God creates something new. Psalms of new orientation renew us as a people of faith by recounting the ways in which God’s intervening actions allow life to flourish in those desolate places where death seems inevitable. They reaffirm our belief that suffering and death do not procure the final say. The God who rescues us from the pit, from the suffering of Sheol, assures us that although our troubles may linger overnight, the LORD of life turns our mourning into dancing and clothes us with joy. Psalms of new orientation therefore offer us a “variety of solutions on a continuum of continuity and discontinuity” appearing in the psalter as “rich and

39 Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 100.
40 Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 100.
41 Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 47.
42 Psalm 30:11.
varied...modes of speech.” The most common psalmic expressions of the journey from disorientation to new orientation include:

a. Personal Songs of Thanksgiving, or the story of an individual’s transition from a period of troubling disorientation to a new-found season of gratitude.

I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.” By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed. To you, O, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication: “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!”

Joy comes in the morning, though my weeping fills the night. I will praise you daily, God who heals distress and fright.

Long have I been troubled, for I could not see your face. Doubt and fear possessed me when I could not sense your grace. Joy comes in the morning, bringing new life after tears. Holy One, I bless you, for you are a God who hears.

b. Communal Songs of Thanksgiving, or a community’s expression of gratitude for the acts of God that moved a people from disorientation into new orientation.

If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—let Israel now say—
if it had not been the LORD who was on our side,
when our enemies attacked us,
thен they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
thен over us would have gone
the raging waters.
Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth.
We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped.
Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124

Our help is in the name of the LORD;
the one who made the heavens with a word;
Creator of the world, each living thing.
Come, bless the LORD, lift up your hearts and sing:
“Our help is in the name of God the LORD.”

When evil seems to have the upper hand,
call on God’s name: the LORD, the great “I AM.”
When troubles rise and all around gives way,
remember God stays with us night and day.
Our help is in the name of God the LORD.

Praise God the LORD who hears the captives’ prayer;
like birds escaping from the fowler’s snare,
we are set free; our praises now ascend:
Blessed be the LORD: Creator, Savior, Friend.
Our help is in the name of God the LORD.

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c. Psalms of Enthronement, sometimes referred to as Victory Psalms, are literary celebrations of God’s triumph over Israel’s adversaries.⁴⁶

Praise the LORD!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
Great is our LORD, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
The LORD lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.
Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.
He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.
He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.
His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.
Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 147

Refrain
Sing to God, with joy and gladness,
hymns and psalms of gratitude;
with the voice of praise discover
that to worship God is good.

God unites the scattered people,
gathers those who wandered far;
heals the hurt and broken spirits,
tending every wound and scar. Refrain

Such is God’s great power and wisdom,
none can calculate or tell;
keen in God to ground the wicked
and with humble folk to dwell. Refrain

God with clouds the sky curtained,
thus ensuring rain shall fall;
earth, responding, grows to order
food for creatures great and small. Refrain

God’s discernment never favors
strength or speed to lift or move;
God delights in those who worship,
trusting in God’s steadfast love. Refrain

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⁴⁶ Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 140.
d. Hymns of Praise, or songs sung in celebration of God’s character, God’s person, and
the nature of God’s liberating actions.47

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
    praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
    praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
Praise him with trumpet sound;
    praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
    praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
    praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 150

Refrain
Praise ye the Lord, hallelujah!
Ev’rybody praise the Lord.
Praise ye the Lord, hallelujah!
Ev’rybody praise the Lord.
Praise God with the sound of the trumpet;
praise God with the lute and the harp;
praise God with the timbrel and dancing;
praise God wherever you are. Refrain
Praise God with holy cymbals;
praise God with strings and with pipes;
praise God with clashing cymbals;
praise God with all of your might. Refrain
Praise God in the holy temple;
praise God for almighty deeds;
praise God for those bountiful mercies;
for God fulfills our needs. Refrain
Praise God on top of the mountains;
praise God both day and night;
praise God down in the low valleys;
praise God because it’s alright. Refrain
J. Jefferson Cleveland © J. Jefferson Cleveland

Processing Mental Illness Through the Lens of Orientation, Disorientation, and New
Orientation

The personal narrative I recounted in Chapter 1 is only one part of my journey through chronic
mental illness. Over the past decade, I endured numerous treatments for my mental health
challenges, including an ever-changing combination of psychotropic pharmaceuticals, cognitive
behavioral therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), sensory

47 Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 158.
deprivation therapy, a serotonin-stimulating procedure known as Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) and most recently, a new drug called Spravato, a derivative of an anesthetic known as ketamine, that is administered via a nasal spray. In an ongoing effort to understand my diagnoses, I began to read about a condition known as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). I spoke with a physician about my findings and after many months of meticulously tracking my symptoms, I observed that my depression and anxiety worsened dramatically the days leading up to the start of my menstrual cycle. Between five and ten percent of women in their childbearing years are believed to live with PMDD. It is common for women to experience some level of discomfort during their menstrual cycle—a condition known as Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)—however, the symptoms of PMDD are much more severe and for many women, are almost entirely psychological in nature: heightened anxiety, paranoia, unexplainable sadness or tearfulness, increased irritability and agitation, fatigue, feeling out of control, drastic mood swings, nights of insomnia, and suicidal ideations. The onset of symptoms occurs every month ten to fourteen days before menstruation begins.

The exact cause of PMDD remains unknown, though its expression is linked to hormonal fluctuations involved in the reproductive cycle. For women living with PMDD, these hormonal shifts cause a serious serotonin deficiency, resulting in the onset of psychological and physical symptoms. While these symptoms typically subside a few days after the onset of menstruation, when they are present, they easily disrupt the most basic functions of a woman’s daily life, from maintaining healthy personal relationships to focusing on common tasks. As I worked through Brueggemann’s three-part method for classifying the psalms, it struck me that my chronic mood

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disorder unfolds in a similar fashion. Every month, I experience the emotionally intricate dance that is PMDD, which involves days of stability and serenity (orientation), hopelessness and struggle (disorientation), and an eventual return to equilibrium (new orientation).

Living with a Mental Health Problem Part I: Days of Orientation

Over the last two years, I have uncovered that my depression and anxiety are generated by a heightened psychological response to the monthly fluctuation of my reproductive hormones estrogen and progesterone—the main performers in the menstrual cycle. Every month, I give thanks for the weeks, or in some cases, mere days, where I am cradled in the experience of orientation. I am filled with thanksgiving and confidence; it feels as if God set me upon the unshakable foundations of the earth. These are the days each month I feel my most authentic self—the person that I am proud to show to the rest of the world. I am a reasonable and critical thinker during this time; my emotional and rational sides complement one another and work together to solve problems. I feel inspired by my vocation and crave meaningful social interaction with the people in my life—my family, my faith community, and my mentors and friends. During these fruitful days, I complete my day-to-day tasks while still under a tolerable amount of anxiety. Most noticeably, my emotional responses to the people and circumstances in my life are more thoughtful, measured, and carefully executed. Quite simply, I feel alive—as if I could “sing praises to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.” Around the fourteenth day of my cycle, my days of orientation begin to shift into days that I would categorize as disorienting.

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50 Psalm 104:5.
51 Psalm 104:33.
Living with a Mental Health Problem Part II: Days of Disorientation

As my hormones fluctuate, my brain and body know that days of disorientation are just around the corner. Everything I thought I knew about my life and the way I move about the world begins to shift. It is as if I no longer ‘have my being,’ as large parts of my very self—my affect, my personality, and my disposition—are lost one-by-one to my PMDD symptoms. My days of disorientation are categorized by apprehension and fear. It is unsettling to rise in the morning and not know what kind of mood I will be in or what level of functioning I will be able to achieve that day. My day-to-day life is suddenly enveloped with an infinite sense of dread. To escape this feeling, I often retreat to the bed, only rousing to eat, take my meds, or answer an occasional email. It is common for me to miss days of work, delay my normal responsibilities, and excuse myself from social events or family activities that I would otherwise enjoy. Instead, I conjure up ways to make myself as small as possible—not only out of an abundance of shame and self-loathing—but to protect the people in my life from myself and my emotional outbursts, my terse, caustic reactions, and my hopelessly negative attitude. My disoriented brain finds countless ways to tell me I have nothing to offer; eventually, I convince myself that even God has abandoned me in my despair. What a disgusting, pitiful, pointless waste of a life, I often think to myself. What a disappoint I must be. Maybe I am just a mistake after all. This description of my days of disorientation is indeed bleak, but it is part of my truth—my reality of living with my particular mental health challenge. Yet it is only one part of me. On most days, I do not deny it or try to run from it anymore, although there are days when I still I grieve my diagnoses. I believe this is why Psalm 88 aptly describes my experience of PMDD-induced disorientation:

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52 The end of this sentence is a reference to a song by Fred Rogers titled, “Sometimes I Wonder If I’m a Mistake.” Fred Rogers, A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: The Poetry of Mister Rogers. (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2019), 88–89.
1 O LORD, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
2 let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.
3 For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
4 I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
5 like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
6 You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

Selah

8 You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
9 my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call on you, O LORD;
I spread out my hands to you.
10 Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you?

Selah

11 Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
12 Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?
13 But I, O LORD, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
14 O LORD, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
15 Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.
16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.
17 They surround me like a flood all day long;
from all sides they close in on me.
18 You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
my companions are in darkness. 53

53 Psalm 88.
Brueggemann writes that Psalm 88 “is an embarrassment to conventional faith,” meaning that for those believers who prefer to only live in the light of the resurrection, Psalm 88 presents challenges for those who go to great lengths to escape the darker realities of life.\(^{54}\) For those people living with a chronic mental health problem, our lives—including our lives of faith—is already rather unconventional. Living with a mental illness not only means we must devise new ways of existing in the world, but that many of us also must work harder to simply remain in the world. Psalm 88 is a raw cry from a believer whose life is in shambles. She pleads with God for contact but is unsuccessful in soliciting a response. Psalm 88 is indeed a depiction of a dark night of the soul—one where the sufferer remains in the emptiness of her abandonment, ultimately realizing that she is entirely alone.\(^{55}\)

I believe Psalm 88 speaks to the experience of many people with mental health problems directly in that it does not follow the typical schematics of a lament psalm. A normative lament psalm employs a predictable literary pattern: invocation, complaint, petition, and finally, trust.\(^{56}\) One can recognize some of these elements in Psalm 88, which begins with an invocation:

“O LORD, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.”\(^{57}\)

Receiving no answer from God, the psalmist makes another appeal in verse nine: “my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.”\(^{58}\)

Brueggemann suggests that Psalm 88 is adamant in its insistence on the part of the believer; yet

\(^{54}\) Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 78.

\(^{55}\) Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 78.

\(^{56}\) Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 2–7.

\(^{57}\) Psalm 88:1–2.

\(^{58}\) Psalm 88:9.
the psalm is harsh on Yahweh’s unresponsiveness. “The truth of this psalm,” Brueggemann writes, “is that Israel lives in a world where there is no answer.”

For people living with mental illness, that sounds dreadfully familiar, as it often feels that there are no finite answers to our pleas for mercy or understanding. Mental illness is mysterious and varies greatly from person to person. Modern psychiatry still cannot trace the etiology of mental illness with any certainty, although many researchers and physicians speculate that genetics, brain chemistry, exposure to trauma, and adverse childhood experiences might play a role. With no definitive cure for mental illness, our only option is to continue exploring ways to manage our symptoms in ways that allow life to flourish—even amid hopelessness.

Beginning in verse three, the psalmist addresses Yahweh with an onslaught of complaints. Psalm 88, for now, continues in the typical literary pattern of a lament psalm:

For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.
You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape…

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60 Psalm 88:3–8.
Brueggemann suggests that this speech is not necessarily presented to God to provoke an answer; it is a display of sheer anger.\(^61\) The psalmist convinces herself not only that death is near, but that God is at the root of her demise.\(^62\)

While petition is often at the heart of the lament psalms, no specific instances of petition occur in Psalm 88, thereby breaking with the traditional literary template of the lament psalm. The psalmist does not request or demand that God act in some way. Psalmic petitions are expressed by common key phrases, such as “Be present, God,” “Hear my cry!” or “Deliver me from the sword!”\(^63\) Instead, the psalmist continues her angry tirade without interruption as her rage completely overcomes her:

O LORD, why do you cast me off?  
Why do you hide your face from me?  
Wretched and close to death from my youth up,  
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.  
Your wrath has swept over me;  
your dread assaults destroy me.”\(^64\)

The final section of a typical lament psalm is a sudden new orientation toward trust in God. Usually introduced with a “but” or “yet” in the text, it is the point where the psalmist’s cries turn from despair toward praise, hope, or trust.\(^65\) In the case of Psalm 88, that “but” or “yet” moment that brings about a renewed sense trust never comes. Instead, “the speaker is shunned in darkness,” writes Brueggemann. “The last word in the psalm is darkness. The last word is darkness. The last theological word here is darkness. Nothing works. Nothing is changed. Nothing is resolved. All things deny life.”\(^66\)

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\(^{63}\) Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 24.  
\(^{64}\) Psalm 88:14–16.  
\(^{65}\) Norman, *You Can Talk to God Like That*, 2–7.  
Psalm 88 is visceral, primal, and unrefined. During the most taxing days of my mental health challenges, I feel the way Brueggemann describes the ending of Psalm 88: darkness indeed steals the last word. According to my own circumstances, my body does not work as it should; my brain is broken; I will never feel healed or whole; death is the only path toward the peace that I long for.

**Living with a Mental Health Problem Part III: Days of New Orientation**

As a person living with mental health diagnoses, I must believe that my mental illness does not claim my entire identity. Yes, my condition is chronic, and on some days, I must work harder than most to stay alive. In my moments of disorientation, however, underneath all the pain, I truly want to live. At some point during my menstrual cycle, I begin to remember this; I remember the feeling of being loved and loving others. It occurs to me how exhausting it is to be angry and agitated all the time. Eventually, it dawns on me that I am not the person I appear to be when experiencing a painful episode of PMDD. If I can keep my heart and mind open just enough, God finds a way to let me know that I am *still good* despite my pain and suffering, along with the pain and suffering I have knowingly or unknowingly caused others. God assures me that somewhere deep inside my pain that I still have a purpose. I can love and serve others because of the kindness of those who loved and served me. I can advocate for the inclusion and wellbeing of others because God calls us to stand in solidarity with our neighbors—without exception.

My path toward healing provides me with the knowledge that I *can* do this work while just being me—exactly as I am—even though mental illness remains an undeniable part of my life and shapes my way of being in the world. Much like God’s gift of grace, the liberating honesty of lament is for everyone, not just people living with mental health problems. We do not
have to do anything to earn it. In fact, as Norman confirms, “we don’t have to be mostly good, or even one little bit good, to tell God when we are miserable.”

It is this belief that launches me into days of new orientation, thereby completing the movement Brueggemann describes when he writes about the shift that occurs between disorientation to new orientation—those moments when we are “surprised by a new gift from God, a new coherence made present to us when we thought all was lost.”

The State of Lament in Faith Communities

Despite the numerous ways the Psalter expresses the vast gamut of human emotion, throughout its history, the church began to regard lament with suspicion and even hostility. “Why, after all, would a people of the Resurrection need such a construct?” ponders writer and pastor Philip Gardner. “Jesus triumphed over sin and death; shouldn’t Christian worship therefore be a joyous celebration?” While Gardner poses a fair question, Jesus’ triumph over sin and death is just one piece of the Gospel story. Prayers and songs of lament, therefore, invite the worshipping assembly to identify with the suffering of Christ, for we must not separate the glory of the resurrection from the suffering of the cross.

The early Christian church developed when Greco-Roman laws and culture were still a part of the social and cultural landscape, both of which influenced the church’s relationship with lament. For instance, Greco-Roman leaders created funeral privatization laws to control

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67 Norman, You Can Talk to God Like That, 20.
68 Brueggemann, The Spirituality of the Psalms, 11.
excessive public mourning. Gender bias also played a role in the decline of corporate lament. Certain texts written by Plato depict lamentation as a form of negative femininity; the sight of a lamenting female signified an unnecessary public display of hyper-emotionality, rivalry, and wantonness. These attitudes made their way into the liturgical and theological fabric of the early Christian church. The practice of lament became synonymous with idolatry and irrationality.

Contemporary theologians and ministry practitioners recognize the dangers that the loss of lament presents to faith communities. Loyola University Theology Professor Rebekah Ecklund writes “the losses that result from the absence of lament in church are many. Failing to authorize and invite lament pushes suffering, and those who suffer, to the margins, and in some cases out of churches all together.” This is highly problematic for faith communities who are called to seek out those who suffer, retrieve them from the fringes of society, and lead them into the welcoming embrace of God’s light. If communities of faith are not able to abide in love with those who weep and mourn, just what, exactly, are we doing to love and serve the world?

Summoning the courage to connect with someone in pain is a far more compassionate approach than the typical meaningless platitudes we utter when we do not know what to say to people who are suffering: “God doesn’t give us anything we can’t handle,” or “Don’t worry, everything happens for a reason,” or “It’s better this way. At least they are no longer in any pain.” Norman labels this as “spiritual gaslighting” when she writes, “promising everything will be okay when in fact things are not okay and we have no way of knowing what will happen in

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75 This sentence references the Mission Statement of Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend, where at the close of every service of worship we recite together: “As the Body of Christ, we are called and sent to love and serve the world.”
the future…this is not what lamenting together looks like.” While well-intentioned, these are not the kinds of sentiments a suffering person wants or needs to hear. Rather, they need to know that their suffering is seen and heard within a compassionate community that actively works to find ways to remind them they are not alone. Presbyterian minister and children’s Public Television programming pioneer, Fred Rogers, wrote a song called “Then Your Heart is Full of Love” that describes the power of love to empathize with the sadness of others:

When your heart can sing another’s gladness,
Then your heart is full of love.
When your heart can cry another’s sadness,
Then your heart is full of love.

The Role of Music in Lament: “God Has Work for Us to Do”

It is not always easy to find words suitable to communicate our complicated human emotions as a gathered community in front of God. At other times, we may be able to access these words, but our lips remain sealed in fear of what others might think or say because of our public display of emotion. Sister Delores Dufner, hymn writer and member of Saint Benedict’s Monastery in Minnesota, emphasizes the importance of naming the realities that comprise our human experience within the liturgies of the church. “Without prayers and songs of lament,” she writes, “we may fail to stir up compassion in our churches and so fail to move our members to the deeds of mercy to which Jesus’ Gospel calls us.” If we omit opportunities for gathered worshipping communities to lament together, we present a false sense that all is well with the world, that

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76 Norman, You Can Talk to God Like That, 64.
77 Rogers, A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood, 115.
78 This heading is a reference to the title of Mark Miller’s choral anthem called God Has Work for Us to Do, by Mark A. Miller and Carl P. Daw Jr. Words © 1996 Hope Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Music © 2012 Choristers Guild. All rights reserved.
suffering cannot reach us, and that there is no need to concern ourselves with the realities of what is happening within our communities.\textsuperscript{80}

Don Saliers’ prophetic voice does not hesitate to call out the church in its complacency regarding the current state of lament: “Anguish and inner struggles with pain and injustice continue in people’s personal lives but rarely find communal ritual expression.”\textsuperscript{81} Saliers hypothesizes that the Psalter remains neglected in today’s faith communities because the overall biblical literacy of the Christian church is in steady decline. “In many cases,” he says, “the psalms are not taught as integral to the understanding of God’s relationship to history and the whole created order. Many worshippers do not know that the great prophetic and messianic themes are found in poetic form in the psalms.”\textsuperscript{82}

This gap in our understanding of the scriptures, specifically, the abrasive and demanding language of the psalms, affects the way these texts are presented and sung in the context of worship. Noting that Good Friday and some of the other penitential psalms used during the season of Lent are the exceptions, Saliers concludes that “the way psalms are sung or recited is often incongruent with their actual emotional and theological content.”\textsuperscript{83} Brueggemann expressed a similar opinion when he wrote, “It is a curious fact that the church has, by and large, continued to sing songs of orientation in a world increasingly experienced as disoriented.”\textsuperscript{84}

Pastoral musicians possess the potential to play an essential role in the reinvigoration of the practice of lament in today’s faith communities. Believing that when we sing, we pray, Saliers encourages pastoral musicians to lead their people in an emotional training of the ear and

\textsuperscript{81} Saliers, “Lament Denial in a Lamentable World,” 81.
\textsuperscript{82} Saliers, “Lament Denial in a Lamentable World,” 82.
\textsuperscript{83} Saliers, “Lament Denial in a Lamentable World,” 82.
\textsuperscript{84} Brueggemann, \textit{Spirituality of the Psalms}, 25.
the heart. “The ministries of the congregation and the ongoing life of intercession in light of
social and personal suffering,” he writes, can be strengthened by the gradual reincorporation of
learning the psalter. 85 The choices we make—the careful, thoughtful selection of hymns, songs,
sermons, and prayers of the faithful “can be deepened by making these connections visible and
audible in the assembly.” 86

The musical and liturgical resources needed for pastoral musicians to make such
decisions are unfortunately few and far between. In 2012, pastor and writer David Bjorlin
conducted a survey of available lament songs and prayers within the hymnal used by his home
church, The Covenant Hymnal. He found that lament was mostly offered through the psalter and
in some of the prayers found within his denomination. He also observed that most of the hymns
labeled as hymns of lament focused on the sinfulness of the individual followed by an immediate
move into an assurance of God’s faithfulness. While there is no doubt that “lamenting one’s
sinfulness and remembering God’s faithfulness are necessary themes in hymnody, the hymnal
does not offer the type of lament that is so prevalent within the psalter.” 87 Bjorlin discovered that
The Covenant Hymnal, while aptly representing hymns and songs of orientation and new
orientation, did not include an equal number of hymns and songs of disorientation. It is likely
that hymnals of other denominations present the same problem.

Holy Lament: Not Just for People with Mental Illness

If you know or care about someone with a mental health disorder, chances are, they already have a plan in place or a network of support to help them identify and communicate their laments regarding their illness. Sometimes people with mental health problems adhere to a lament denial mentality. They refuse help or cannot access the help they need; some are forced to accept the attitude that “this is just the way God made me!” For those people living with a mental health problem who possess the desire and the means to find a healthier, more balanced way of living with their illness, the prayerful process of lament serves as an important stepping-stone on their path to healing and recovery. The opportunity to enter a space of lament within a community of faith affords people with mental health problems access to a kind of healing and belonging that doctor’s visits, medications, and individual therapy simply cannot offer.

Significant pastoral implications arise when we fail to provide a place where people can address God in their lament and sorrow. To engage in lament with God in the presence of one another is a healthy, helpful practice not just for those to suffer with a mental health disorder, but for all members of the Body of Christ. While not all of us will experience a diagnosable mental illness in our lifetimes, there is no one alive who can escape the suffering that is a part of our shared human experience. I believe that to lament as a community of faith means that we do not have to leave the bruised and broken parts of ourselves—no matter what their origin—at the door when we enter a service of worship. I believe that God waits for us and wants to hear the entirety of our stories. God lovingly accepts our laments as signs of our faithfulness and devotion—not as indications of unbelief or dwindling faith. The time to create liberating spaces within our communities of faith for our friends and neighbors to mourn and grieve is now. As pastoral

musicians, we contribute to these spaces through the musical and liturgical choices we make as we plan worship for our communities. It is vital that we seek out those musical and liturgical resources that help us learn to lament before God so that community transformation, reconciliation, and hope are found.\textsuperscript{90}

As we ponder the roles that music and liturgy play in the practice of corporate lament, let us consider that lamentation, much like singing, is a full-body, sensory experience. We feel the beads of sweat drip down our brow as we shake our fists and clench our teeth in anger at God. We taste the saltiness of our tears as we weep quietly before a God whose presence we doubt. We inhale the spice of incense as it fills our pores with the comforts of holy ritual even though we are empty inside. We hear the echoes of our sobs as we let the voices of the singing congregation carry us through unspeakable pain. Nothing puts us in touch with our bodies quite like singing, making corporate singing an ideal arena for congregations to begin to reexamine their relationship with the psalter and other texts that invite us into a musical space of holy lament.

The final chapter of this thesis is a sampling of music and liturgies from my own ministry context at Christ the King Lutheran Church in South Bend, Indiana. The musical and liturgical examples contained in the following pages enable my congregation to find the courage to invite God to break their hearts open to something bigger than themselves. The material found in Chapter 5 will support and encourage pastoral musicians and other leadership to explore the concept of lament and how it can be utilized to strengthen individual congregations and entire communities as they seek ways to grow into their holy responsibilities: liberation, solidarity, and justice.

\textsuperscript{90} Bjorlin, “The Courage to Lament,” 32.
CHAPTER 5:

WORDS MATTER: LITURGIES THAT EMBRACE AND EMPOWER PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

“...hold on, hold on, to find a way to get through. And when your hope is gone and you can’t hold on, we will hold on to you.”

–Adam Tice

Christ the King’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope: A Liturgy of Possibility

Christ the King Lutheran Church’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope began in 2014 in celebration of the forty-year partnership between Christ the King and Seasons Counseling of Michiana. In the years that followed, this event grew into a liturgical form all its own. This hymn festival is a liturgy of possibility. It poses the idea that people with mental illness are assets to their communities—including faith communities—and that the church is likewise an asset to individuals struggling to manage and recover from their mental health challenges. The words and music that comprise the Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope provide the gathered assembly opportunities to reflect upon how its ministries have responded to mental illness in the past, and what kinds of theological actions it will take in the future so that people with these disorders are welcomed out of the shadows and into the embrace of a healing community.²

People with mental health problems possess various gifts and life experiences that, if given a chance, will help advance Christ the King’s mission to love and serve the world. We are survivors. We are loving, compassionate people who, although well-acquainted with the darkness of suffering and grief, are also capable of living lives of great hope and promise. This

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¹ This is a partial quote from a hymn titled “When Pain or Sorrow Is Too Much to Bear.” See: Adam M. L. Tice, Pulse and Breath: 50 More Hymn Texts (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2021), 124
² For a complete copy of Christ the King’s 6th Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope, please see Appendix A.
constant cycle of journeying through darkness and death into the light of resurrection suggests that the experience of mental illness is kindred to the story of the Christian church—a continuous journey along intermingling paths of death and resurrection.

This chapter presents a series of sample liturgies that originated at Christ the King Lutheran Church over the last several years. The words and music of these liturgies support faith communities in their exploration of liberation, mental health justice, and collective lamentation. Through intentional sacred examination of our pain and longing, we are strengthened for the theological tasks ahead of us: to create a culture of liberation and justice within our communities of faith.

**Christ the Annual King’s Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope: The Music**

In October 2019, Christ the King Lutheran Church’s Sixth Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope began with song. Because the festival is a collaborative, community effort, the Pre-Service Music featured Christ the King’s contemporary ensemble, *Xalt!*, as they introduced a Chris Tomlin song, followed by a choral anthem from The Ripple Effect, a local community choir. As the Pre-Service Music concluded, I sang a Mark Miller arrangement of the traditional African American spiritual, “Balm in Gilead.” This lengthy musical offering at the start of the festival is purposeful. While there will be somber moments and opportunities to lament as a gathered community later in the evening, the opening music intends to welcome, uplift, and ease the spirit.

This evening’s hymn festival asks a great deal from the gathered assembly; the thought of even stepping into a church is a daunting idea for many people. Other attendees may live with a mental health challenge, while others are loved ones or concerned allies. This evening may be the first time that guests hear topics of mental illness spoken aloud in such a candid manner.
inside of a community of faith. The liturgical approach to this topic will strike some people as challenging, surprising, and even jarring. The Pre-Service Music, therefore, provides space for all in attendance to familiarize themselves with the worship folder, prepare themselves for the truthful nature of the words and music, and to consider what level of participation they will be able to offer the gathered community over the course of the evening.

The music continued during the Invitation with another performance by the University of Notre Dame Children’s Choir (NDCC), who sang a newly commissioned piece by Mark Miller and Adam Tice, “Come, Dove of Heaven” (2019). As will be discussed more in-depth later in this chapter, mental health challenges affect people of all ages. It is an essential message to the spirit of this hymn festival and the gathered community that children be a visible—and audible—part of the liturgy.

Figure 5.1 The Notre Dame Children’s Choir performs at Christ the King’s Sixth Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope.
Without pause, the evening moves into its first congregational hymn: “Come and find the quiet center” (1989) by Shirley Erena Murray, set to the tune of BEACH SPRING. This hymn does not mention anything related to mental health specifically; it is simply a musical invitation to release the events and stresses of the day so that we may all open ourselves to receive the stories of others in our midst.

Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed: clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace, God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being, touches base, making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun, raising courage when we’re shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other’s pain, let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain: there’s a place for deepest dreaming, there’s a time for hearts to care, in the Spirit’s lively scheming there is always room to spare! © 1992 Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL.

After the Words of Welcome from Alexandra Sobieski, Executive Director of Seasons Counseling of Michiana, Christ the King’s Senior Pastor, Caroline Satre, led us in an Opening Prayer. Afterward, Xalt! performed a new musical interpretation of an older text: “Come, you disconsolate” (1816/1831) by authors Thomas Moore (1779–1852) and Thomas Hastings (1784–1872). In addition to a new melody and an arrangement for the band, I wrote a supplementary text for the added B section. This song began a pattern of alternating music and word that guided the structure of the next section of the service. Each musical number, whether a congregational hymn or a musical offering from one of the choral ensembles, is followed by a time for Words of Reflection. This interplay of text and music and the spoken narrative come together to tell the

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hidden story of mental health challenges and question how the church might respond. The following section addresses the texts for these Words of Reflection.

A notable turning point in the service arrived with the singing of Adam Tice’s hymn, “When pain or sorrow is too much to bear” (2019). Tice’s text is distinctive in that it is written from the perspective of the faith community. Unlike the opening hymn, it is an invitation from the hymn writer to the community; “When pain or sorrow is too much to bear” is a love letter from the church to her people in pain. Tice explains that:

Mike Erb, a fellow member of the Voices Together hymnal committee, lost his brother Rudy to suicide in early 2017. Early one Sunday morning I had a dream that the committee was meeting together, and that Mike wanted to share a song with us. When I woke up I wrote out as much of it as I could remember and then worked towards crafting the rest. . . Once I had a full score in hand I sent it to Mike, without telling him I had written it or how it had come to me. He immediately responded that it captured what he had been going through since Rudy’s death. While there are many songs that invite individuals to commit to a community of faith, I have found very few that name the commitment of the community to an individual.4

Learning of the background of this hymn from its author increases its significance for expanding awareness of the presence of mental illness in faith communities by creating a platform for the church to address suicidality. The refrain is a powerful message to anyone who may not be able to see an end to their pain and anguish: “hold on, hold on, to find a way to get through. / And when your hope is gone and you can’t hold on, / we will hold on to you.”

The implications of this text are vastly important to the future of the faith community’s ministry and care of people living with mental health problems: how many lives could be changed or even saved should the church’s response to mental illness be one of compassion and solidarity rather than fear and dismissal? The message of this text is only the beginning—a sung commitment to carry one another through the more harrowing moments of life, including those

4 Tice, Pulse and Breath, 124.
individuals and families whose lives are affected by suicide. Turning this commitment into action can take shape in different ways: perhaps it is a phone call to check-in with someone who is struggling with suicidal thoughts. Maybe it is a home visit and a warm meal lovingly prepared for someone recovering from a suicide attempt. This commitment to care can also mean connecting families with community resources (local counselors, group therapy opportunities, support groups, etc.) to help them through the experience of a mental health crisis or loss.

After the intensity of “When pain or sorrow is too much to bear,” the NDCC presented another Adam Tice text with music composed by Bex Gaunt titled “In the morning, In the evening” (2009). Meant to comfort, console, and remind us that God holds us anywhere we go and in anything we do, Gaunt writes that “we are not alone. God reassures us that there is no sin too grave, or place too far, that could jeopardize our true identity as God’s beloved children.”

Continuing upon the theme of belovedness, The Ripple Effect then sang a choral anthem by Mark Miller, “Child of God” (2014). The Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope requires and values texts and music that call for the inclusivity of all God’s children. Therefore, I lean on Mark Miller’s music with some frequency. “Child of God” not only calls us to embrace our belovedness as God’s children, but it also calls out and brings our attention to the systems that repeatedly cause the oppression and exclusion of large groups of peoples: other individuals, the world, and even communities of faith. The last section of the anthem emphasizes the importance that there is nothing—or no one—that can separate us from the truth that we are

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6 In the Morning, In the Evening, by Bex Gaunt and Adam M.L. Tice. Words © 2013. Music © 2019 GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.
7 Other notable songs and anthems by Mark Miller that draw attention to themes of welcome and inclusivity include: Broken Yet Chosen,” (Choristers Guild A1537), Christ Has Broken Down the Wall, (Choristers Guild A1224), Draw the Circle Wide, from The Faith We Sing #3154, Abingdon Press, I Choose Love, (Choristers Guild A1491), More Love, (Hal Leonard 00216066), The Day is Coming, (Choristers Guild A1524), Welcome to God’s Grace, (Choristers Guild A1429), Welcome, from “Roll Down, Justice,” (Choristers Guild BK72), We Dream of a Church, from “Roll Down, Justice,” (Choristers Guild BK72).
indeed someone. Together, Miller writes, we are a family, and we are meant to be loved and accepted just as we are.\(^8\) I cannot think of a more appropriate message to include in a hymn festival intended to widen a faith community’s acceptance of people with mental health problems and their loved ones.

Figure 5.2 The Ripple Effect, directed by Sherry Klinedinst, sings at Christ the King’s Sixth Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope.

Toward the middle of the service, we enter what is called a Time of Remembrance. As stated in the worship folder, “At this time, as the music begins, if you would like to light a candle for a friend or loved one who is struggling with a mental health challenge, or for someone in your life who has died by suicide, please make your way to the tables at the back of the sanctuary.” The music I chose for this occasion was William Bolcom’s “Nevermore Will the Wind,” (1991) a song for mezzo-soprano and piano. With poetry written by American modernist

\(^8\) *Child of God*, by Mark A. Miller. Words and music © 2014 Choristers Guild. All rights reserved.
novelist and poet Hilda Doolittle (1886–1961), it is a song about coming to terms with death and loss, realizing all the familiarities of life the dead will never again experience:

Nevermore will the wind
cherish you again,
evermore will the rain.

Nevermore
shall we find you bright
in the snow and wind.

The snow is melted,
the snow is gone,
and you are flown:

Like a bird out of our hand,
like a light out of our heart,
you are gone.⁹

Even when performed at a relaxed tempo, this song lasts just under two minutes.

Assuming that only a few individuals would participate in the lighting of candles, I thought this would be sufficient time for this portion of the service. However, when I glanced up from the piano, I was surprised to see that the line for the candle lighting was still quite long. I also observed that nearly every member of the NDCC left their pew to light a candle. I did not anticipate that the lives of these upper middle school and lower high school-aged youth would already be touched by mental illness in such a way. This experience speaks to the importance of facilitating a tactile exercise, such as lighting a candle, to process complicated emotions. As I continued improvising on Bolcom’s music and people returned to their pews, I considered the enormity of mental health disorders in our community.

The Time of Remembrance immediately segued into the Prayers of Intercession. Before the initial petition was read, I introduced the sung response to the assembly, (a musical snippet of Mark Miller’s “How Long”) who then repeated this refrain together. Underneath quiet chords played on the piano, each petition was read in alternatum by either the senior or associate pastor, followed by the singing of “How long? How long? / How much longer must we wait?” Although Miller originally composed this song as a response to gun violence, it serves as a vehicle for other outcries of injustice, including people who live with mental illness. Miller reflects on the Psalmist’s words:
How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? How long, O God, must we feel like outsiders; strangers in a strange land? A people held captive by fear, abuse of power, prejudice, and unjust institutions? . . . We long for your justice, for your peace, O God. We long to be released from these shackles of fear and injustice. And until that time, we cry out with the Psalmist, “How Long?”10

Figure 5.4 Associate Pastor Brad Davick anoints a man with holy oil during the Time of Remembrance.

Christ the King’s Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is an emotionally charged event for the gathered assembly; at some point in the evening, participants may feel overwhelmed and ready for a moment of respite. The purpose of the Time for Anointing following the Intercessory Prayers is twofold: it allows time for individual prayer or meditation, and for those who need it, the opportunity to connect with a pastor. Either way, participants are encouraged to use this time to process the feelings they are experiencing. Perhaps the evening conjured painful memories from the past? Or maybe they tapped into a well of sadness regarding the suffering of a friend or loved one? For those navigating these feelings or several other natural reactions, I felt it essential

to provide people with a few moments to breathe, pray, close their eyes, or even move around the room. Other people in the space might feel the need for further connection and support.

Figure 5.5 Senior Pastor Caroline Satre offers a prayer during Christ the King’s Sixth Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope amongst members of the Sanctuary Choir.

These individuals were then welcomed to greet one of the pastors stationed at the back of the sanctuary for anointing with holy oil and a blessing. As both events unfolded, the Sanctuary Choir of Christ the King sang an arrangement of the Babbie Mason hit, “He’ll Find a Way” (1987), a musical reminder that God, despite our deep despair, finds a way to make his presence known to those who are suffering, even when they may not be able to feel much of anything beyond their broken hearts.11

11 For a live video recording of Babbie Mason singing “He’ll Find a Way,” please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGuJeD8Ugzk
The next hymn we sang together was in recognition of another group of people touched by the realities of mental illness—the caregivers. These are the friends, families, and professionals who love and care for individuals living with mental health challenges. Mental illness is a family disease; it changes the lives of every person in the household, as do most serious medical diagnoses. “God bless the ones who watch and wait” (2014) is a tribute to those who sacrifice parts of themselves in service to others. Their stories are often overlooked, and their experience of mental illness is often as lonely and isolating as the person living with the diagnosis. Sung to the tune of O WALY WALY, Shirley Erena Murray’s text recognizes the generous hearts of the caretakers in the room:

God, bless the ones who watch and wait through lonely vigil, constant care, who must stay strong for those they love for hope to shine through bleak despair.

Hold in your light the lives entwined with those impaired they cannot leave, where damaged bodies, damaged minds, become a cause to rage and grieve.

God, bless the arms that lift the weak, adjust a tone for deaf to hear, who calm with love a fretful child, who wash the ill and wipe the tear.

The towel and bason Jesus took is for us all to take and use, in giving respite, easing stress and walking in another’s shoes.

God, bless the ones who watch and wait with cheerful face, though heart may bleed, who ev’ry day commit to care, to serve and meet another’s need.12 © 2014 Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL.

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Since the inception of Christ the King’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope in 2014, part of my private devotional practice in preparing these liturgies is the creation of a new hymn tune. In past years, I have written new hymn tunes for the texts of contemporary hymn writers: Brian Wren’s “Joyful is the dark,” Michael Morgan’s “Hear my cry, O God, and save me,” Edith Sinclair Downing’s “Where is the light when darkness falls,” and Adam Tice’s “There is in every person.” In 2019 (the last time Christ the King hosted an in-person hymn festival due to COVID-19), I set another text by Brian Wren titled “God remembers” (1993).

God remembers pain:
nail by nail, thorn by thorn,
hunger, thirst and muscles torn;
God remembers pain.
Time may dull our griefs
and heal our lesser wounds,
but in eternal Love,
yesterday is now.
God remembers pain,
and pain is in the heart of God.

God remembers joy:
touch of love, taste of food.
All our senses know as good:
God remembers joy.
Love and life flow by
and precious days are gone
but in eternal Love,
everyday is now.
God remembers joy,
and joy is in the heart of God.

God remembers us:
all we were, all we are,
lives within our Lover’s care;
God remembers us.

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13 To access my original hymn tunes used for past Hymn Festivals of Healing and Hope, please see Appendix B.
Time may dull our minds
and death will take us all,
but in eternal Love
ev’ry life is now.
God remembers us,
our life is hid with Christ in God.¹⁴
© 1993 Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL.

A topic addressed at every Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is the power that resides in sharing our stories in community. Wren’s text suggests that each of our stories is known to God. Within the very heart of God lies the entirety of our stories—all the good and the not-so-good. God intimately knows the narrative of our pain and suffering, our joy and delight; there is nothing about our journeys that is unknown to our Creator—the God who wore our flesh, endured our pain, and gave his life so that one day, our pain will be no more. Because the tunes I write for these hymn festivals are brand new to the assembly, a soloist or a small group of singers typically introduces the first stanza. Because I found this particular text so eloquent, I wanted to afford every person the opportunity to sing all of the stanzas. Therefore, after the soloist introduced the first stanza, I invited the congregation to sing the first stanza again.

As the evening draws to a close, it is fitting that the hymn festival conclude with a message from God to God’s people. “I Won’t Let Go” is another choral anthem by Mark Miller, whose text is penned by one of his frequent poetic collaborators, Laurie Zelman. The first time I heard this song, I was in my car. I was listening to Miller’s latest album with his New Haven Collective called The People of God and heard soloist Lydia Muñoz sing these words:

All my life, all this guilt,
all this grief and shame,
all this night I won’t let go
until I know your name,
know your name.

Won’t let go, I won’t let go,  
until you bless me, Lord,  
I won’t let go.

Till you reveal what you would have me do,  
my Lord, my God,  
I won’t let go of you.  
I won’t let go of you.

All this night, all my strength  
called on in this place,  
I confess, now will you bless,  
let me see your face,  
see your face—won’t let go,  
until you bless me, Lord,  
I won’t let go.  
Till you reveal what you would have me do,  
my Lord, my God,  
I won’t let go of you.  
I won’t let go of you. . .
© 2013 Choristers Guild.

I picked up on the words “guilt,” “grief,” and “shame” immediately. Those words are highly relatable to me as a person who struggles with mental health challenges. After listening to the song several times, I slowly began to sense the speaker's persistence. Because of her guilt, grief, and shame, she seemingly shakes her fist at God, as if to say, until you reveal to me the purpose of all this and what I am to do about it, I’m not letting go, God! I’m not letting you go without an answer!

The song begins with a brief piano introduction, followed by the entrance of one voice. This texture continues until the beginning of the second verse, when the drumkit and bass guitar subtly join the soundscape. While the published SATB version introduces the choir during the second half of stanza two, for our live performance at Christ the King, I continued the solo line

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15 *I Won’t Let Go*, by Mark A. Miller. Words by Laurie Zelman. Music by Mark Miller. © 2013 Choristers Guild. All rights reserved.
through the end of the second stanza. I cued the choir to enter at the start of the B section, where they double the text of the solo voice in unison:

   Turn around, have you found,
       God is always here,
       every day, every hour, you must persevere. . .\textsuperscript{16}

The grand turning point in the text and the musical climax of the piece occurs as the speaker of the poem suddenly shifts. As the choir and the soloist continue to belt, “turn around, turn around, God is saying. . .” there is an incredibly powerful exchange of poetic voice, a burst of dynamics, and, for the first time in the whole piece, the presence of four-part choral harmony. God finally answers the cries of the soloist: “I won’t let go!” he says to her. “You are my child, and I won’t let go!”\textsuperscript{17}

   When I finally realized what was happening at this moment, I thought I was going to have to pull my car off the road. I experienced an unexpected visceral reaction followed by a steady flow of tears as I held my face in my hands while trying to remain in my lane. I went through a rapid firing of emotions: sadness (\textit{When will God tell me that he won’t let go?}), anger (\textit{Why hasn’t God made this clear to me?}), and finally, an epiphany (\textit{Wait, God is telling me that he is here. In this moment, He wants me to know that he has not let go of me}).

   Something that is regularly expressed in our weekly meetings of \textit{Fresh Hope for Mental Health} (Christ the King’s support group for people with mental health diagnoses and their loved ones), is the painful sensation of God’s absence during episodes of mental illness. I am no stranger to this feeling, and I believe this is why Zelman’s text and Miller’s original music spoke to me in such a profound way. I understand that not everyone who hears this song will feel similarly or undergo such an emotional reaction. Still, at that moment in time, I was certain of

\textsuperscript{16} Miller, \textit{I Won’t Let Go.}

\textsuperscript{17} Miller, \textit{I Won’t Let Go.}
one thing: this is a text that needs to be widely shared with people living with mental illness. Not only does mental illness diminish the overall health and stability of our day-to-day lives, but it also chips away at our lives of faith, our relationship with God, and our overall sense of belonging in the church.  

**Christ the King’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope: The Script**

The Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is not just an evening of music and congregational song; it is also an evening of storytelling. This intentional interweaving of song and story creates fluidity between the poetry of the hymnody and the prose of the narrative. I call this narrative portion of the festival the script; it is denoted in the worship folder as “Words of Reflection.” The script is the final element of the hymn festival to materialize. Once all the hymns and choral anthems are chosen, I begin to put the poetic and thematic puzzle pieces together to create a coherent, thoughtful liturgy that addresses challenging issues with honesty and grace. While the script is the means upon which the festival propels itself, its musical and poetic purposes are multifaceted. What follows are examples of how the script helps to breathe life into the Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope at Christ the King Lutheran Church.

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18 For a recording of Mark Miller’s “I Won’t Let Go,” please see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p_-gHCHzpU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p_-gHCHzpU)

19 For a complete copy of the 2019 Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope script, please see Appendix C.
Figure 5.6 Alexandra Sobieski, Executive Director of Seasons Counseling of Michiana, delivers the Words of Reflection at Christ the King’s Fourth Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope.
Reinforcement of a Musical Text

At its most practical level, the script includes an introduction to a hymn or an anthem by incorporating spoken words and phrases the assembly is about to hear sung. This aural, verbal prompt reinforces key theological ideas and attitudes regarding mental health issues that is articulated differently in poetic stanzas rather than through melody and harmony alone. One such example is the Words of Reflection that precede the singing of Mark Miller’s “Child of God.” Because Miller’s text is so striking in the context of the hymn festival, the Words of Reflection are a simple paraphrase of the anthem:

No matter what people say or think about me; no matter what people say or think about you, you are a child of God. No matter what the world might say or think about us; no matter what the church says through the decisions and pronouncements it makes on our behalves, we are still beloved children of God. And there is nothing, or no one, who can separate you from the truth that you’re someone. You are family, you are meant to be, and you are a child of God.

Community Invitation

The Words of Reflection are an invitation to the gathered assembly to find the presence of mind required to step into the experiences of others to better understand how mental illness affects people’s lives:

One reason we are gathered here tonight is to remember the power of true presence—our ability to genuinely give of our time and attention to other people and other causes outside of ourselves; to stretch ourselves into someone else’s world, to willingly walk in someone else’s shoes, so that, even if only for a moment, we might understand how other people exist and survive in an ever-changing, increasingly challenging world.

Education

At times, the script describes moments from everyday life as persons with mental health challenges experience them. The presence of mental illness complicates what others consider regular, daily events and experiences: visiting a doctor’s office, running errands, getting children
ready for school, or taking care of one’s hygiene are often confounded by a mood disorder or other mental health problem:

Navigating a mental health challenge can feel insurmountable, confusing, even hopeless. Over time, we might feel guilty, or shameful: “Why can’t I just get ahold of myself?” we might ask. “What is wrong with me?” “Will I ever be able to figure this out?”

**Destigmatization**

Other portions of the script address mental illness in ways aimed to normalize the experience one has while living with a mental health disorder. It suggests the brain is like any other organ in its susceptibility to illness and disease. These kinds of propositions place mental illness on the same diagnostic plane as cancer or diabetes, making mental health disorders a normative part of what it means to live in a human body:

Like our kidneys, or the heart, or the lungs, our brains can become diseased and afflicted to the point where we might begin to forget who we really are; where we might begin to withdrawal from the things that were once important to us, like our families, our dreams and goals, or our faith in a loving, merciful God.

**Plants the Seeds of a Theology of Mental Health**

An essential goal of the Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is to demonstrate to the gathered assembly that the presence of mental illness within communities of faith is a theological issue that deserves the care and attention of that community. The overarching theological idea proposed by both the script and the music over the course of the evening is that nothing—not even mental illness—can separate us from God’s love (Rom 8:35–39); God calls each one of us beloved:

Indeed, friends: God remembers you. No matter where you have been, or what you have done, or what you have left undone in your lives, he remembers you as an irreplaceable piece of his creation, and he delights in you—in all that you were, and in all that you are.
The script also draws attention to the stories of Jesus’ life in the scriptures, highlighting the experiences of God in Jesus during his time on earth. Believing that Jesus, though divine, was fully human, means that he lived through the realities that we all endure as finite beings:

God also remembers the agony of being human:
- the sadness at the death of his friend, Lazarus;
- the anger he felt at the sight of greed in the sacred temple;
- the disappointment he experienced when his twelve companions fell asleep after he’d asked for their prayerful presence in the garden of Gethsemane;
- the betrayal of a trusted friend;
- and a harrowing death to end all death on the cross.

These experiences connect Christ’s life with our lives. People living with mental health disorders can find hope and comfort in knowing that we are not alone in our agony, sadness, anger, disappointment, and fear of death; our Lord was intimately acquainted with each of these emotions, making the story of Jesus’ life on earth akin to our own human story.

**Testimony**

A hymn festival created to spread awareness and promote advocacy within faith communities for people with mental illness would not be authentic if we did not hear from someone for whom mental illness is an everyday reality. In early 2020, Christ the King was preparing to launch its first support group for people with a mental health diagnosis and their loved ones. Therefore, at our 2019 Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope, I shared a part of my story, including my decision to seek help for my depression and anxiety. One of the first places I turned to was a support group that met in a local church:

When I was in graduate school in Bloomington, I somehow found my way to a support group for people living with mental health challenges. We met once a week in the basement of a United Methodist Church. At the time, I had only recently acknowledged my struggles with what I would later discover was clinical depression and anxiety. Finding this support group would have more of an impact on me and my healing process than I would ever know. In hindsight, meeting with that diverse group of people helped me understand that I was not the only one who dealt with these issues. I needed to hear other people’s stories about their lived experiences with mental illness. I needed to see
those people and realize that they were not so different than me. Those people were, for a time, “my people.” Those meetings gave me a safe, non-judgmental space to talk about the hard stuff. I tell you this story because, as a community of faith, we want to be there for the hard stuff.

Sharing a testimony such as this is powerful because it provides a face for people to attach to their idea of mental illness. The term “mental illness” is affixed to feelings of fear, uncertainty, and trepidation. When other people hear and see a person such as myself talk about what it is truly like to live with a diagnosed (or undiagnosed) mental illness, it changes their preconceptions about what mental illness actually is and what it looks like. The sharing of these stories confirms that people with mental health challenges are not always locked away in prisons or institutions; they are often right in front of us, living among us as they work and worship, care for their families, achieve their life’s goals and dreams, and enjoy meaningful relationships and connections in their communities.

Connection to Community Resources

Partly because of Christ the King’s community partnership with Seasons Counseling of Michiana, the Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope is a time to share resources available for any person in need of care and support regarding mental health issues:

And so, if in the future, if you find yourself needing a little more help, guidance, or support in order to face whatever your tomorrows might bring, I hope you will call upon Seasons Counseling of Michiana, or Christ the King Lutheran Church as a source of that support. We believe that it is our call to love and serve the world, and we are here to help.

I shared information about Christ the King’s support groups, and Alexandra Sobieski, Executive Director of Seasons Counseling, shared what services were accessible to anyone in need. These resources were not only integrated into the script, but further information was also provided in print on the back side of the evening’s worship folder. Other considerations for future years
include stocking a table in the narthex with information about how to access local resources, including the services available through Seasons Counseling of Michiana.²⁰

Figure 5.7 All performers sing during Christ the King’s Fourth Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope.

Renewed Commitment to Our Mission

Finally, the script gives Christ the King the opportunity to voice its commitment to the people and families within our community of faith whose lives are impacted by mental illness:

Luckily, we don’t have to have it all figured out, and more importantly, we don’t have to do it alone. There are people out there, many of whom are present tonight, that are willing to walk with you down a road that can one day lead to possibilities of recovery, healing, and hope. That is what Seasons Counseling and Christ the King Lutheran Church want to do in this community. We want to keep exploring ways that we can further

²⁰ Another consideration for future hymn festivals of this nature could include the presence of professional pastoral counselors and/or therapists in case any individual or family might need an extra measure of care and support during the course of the evening.
extend clinical services and pastoral ministries of care to those who feel that no one cares. We want to facilitate safe, welcoming spaces where people can gather and form meaningful relationships over things that really matter to them. So, if you happen to struggle with a mental health challenge; if there ever comes a time when you or a loved one feels like you can’t hold on any longer, let us be the ones that hold onto you.

In essence, we want people with mental health challenges to know that they are seen, heard, and are a vital part of our community. Our lives and our congregation would not be complete without their story and presence among us.

**Reframing the Liturgical Year: Incorporating Mental Illness into the Church Calendar**

Certain times of the church year are particularly appropriate to invite your faith community into a liturgical celebration of mental health awareness and ministry. The season of Advent is a fitting time to meet people amid their darkness. A Service of Longest Night is increasingly popular in many communities of faith during this time of year, sometimes referred to as a Blue Christmas Service. A Service of Longest Night takes place on or around the Winter Solstice in late December. It provides a quiet escape from the incessant, consumer-driven holiday sprint toward Christmas morning. While there is much to celebrate during this season, it can also be a time of loneliness, sadness, and struggle. For people with mental health challenges, the added stress and pressure of the season creates overwhelming feelings and emotions that are apt to bring about additional depression, anxiety, or despair. For others, the season’s festivity is lost to painful memories or the grieving of a loved one who is no longer gathered around the holiday table. Instead of the joyful anticipation we are told to prepare for in sacred and secular traditions, people feel weary, sad, and alone.

While the hymns and other musical selections may change from year to year, Christ the King’s Blue Christmas service offers the same principal liturgical elements each season: reading
of holy scripture, congregational singing, personal and pastoral prayer, and a time for candle lighting in remembrance of the losses endured over the last year. In 2020, this liturgy mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic—a significant source of anxiety and loss.21

United Methodist pastor Susan Gregg Schroeder created an online resource for faith communities searching for ways to reduce the stigma of mental illness in their congregations called Mental Health Ministries. She writes about the complex feelings we face during the holiday season: “There are times when life is good and beautiful, and celebration is appropriate. But there are also times of distress and loss. During those times, we sing sad songs of lament, protest, and complaint about the chaos and harshness that life can sometimes be for us. We often feel afraid, angry, and ashamed. Putting words to this season can often be difficult. But we do this together in our relationship with God.”22

**Mental Health Awareness Sunday**

An additional liturgical opportunity to engage communities of faith in issues mental illness is to offer a Mental Health Awareness Sunday—a time for the church to reflect through word, song, and meal upon social, spiritual, and theological matters related to mental illness. While a Mental Health Awareness Sunday can be implemented any time of year, national holidays are already in place to help guide one’s liturgical planning. In 1990, the United States Congress officially designated the first full week of October as National Mental Illness Awareness Week.23 This happens to be the time of year Christ the King offers its Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and

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21 For a complete copy of Christ the King’s most recent Blue Christmas Service, please see Appendix D.
Hope; however, a Sunday morning celebration could be a better fit for other communities of faith. For either occasion, the pastoral musician will need to create or find liturgical resources to help raise awareness and support people living with mental illness in her faith community.\textsuperscript{24}

Furthermore, the month of May is allocated as Mental Health Awareness Month. In 1949, Mental Health America, a national organization that works toward improving attitudes, treatments, and prevention of mental illness, established Mental Health Awareness Month.\textsuperscript{25} As faith communities work to define their role in the improvement of social attitudes regarding mental illness and the people who live with these diagnoses, the inception of a Mental Health Awareness Sunday is a significant first step for faith communities to widen the welcome for people living with mental health disorders and to initiate discussions about mental illness. Other congregations might choose to find small, but consistent, ways throughout the month to acknowledge topics of mental illness and mental health. Christ the King recently did just that by offering different mental health-related workshops during the Sunday School hour.\textsuperscript{26}

Christ the King’s first Mental Health Awareness Sunday was in February 2020, followed by a similar liturgy in 2021 after returning to in-person worship during a momentary lull in COVID-19 cases in our area. During an early fall 2020 worship planning meeting, Pastor Satre proposed that we meld Transfiguration Sunday with our celebration of Mental Health Awareness. Her suggestion immediately inspired me. I began to see the story of Jesus’

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24} For helpful examples of Mental Health Awareness Sunday liturgies, I suggest starting with the following online resources: The United Church of Christ’s Mental Health Network’s Mental Health Sunday Resource Guide: https://www.mhn-ucc.org/mental-health-sunday/; The Mental Health Ministries Worship Resources page: http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/resources/worship_resources.html. Please note that these resources are merely starting points and can be adapted to fit a particular congregation’s denominational language and traditions.\textsuperscript{25} “Our History,” https://www.mhanational.org/our-history (accessed July 19, 2022).\textsuperscript{26} For further information on Christ the King’s month-long Celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month, please see this article from May 2022: https://www.ctkluth.com/uploads/1/2/2/1/122136102/the_kings_herald_may_2022_web_1.pdf}
Transfiguration in the light of themes of hope and liberation. Just as Jesus was visibly changed on the mountaintop, we are introduced to the possibility that we can also undergo transformation in our lives. We can change, heal, and access the freedom to be all we are—regardless of whether or not we live with a mental health diagnosis—and still be called “beloved” by God. To communicate this idea to the congregation, I wrote the following introduction for the worship folder for the morning of February 23, 2020:

Today we remember when Jesus was revealed as God’s beloved Son on that high mountain. As his heavenly Father echoed the words of his baptism, Jesus was transfigured. He was changed. And while we know how the story goes—that this is only the beginning of Jesus’ walk to the cross—as we silence our Alleluias for the upcoming season of Lent, we are also filled with the possibility that we, too, might be changed; that we may be led out of the shadows and into the light of Christ—the hope of the world.

**Confession and Forgiveness**

Because this was our congregation’s first effort at a Sunday morning service of Mental Health Awareness, Pastor Satre and I agreed that while themes of mental health should be present, they should also be subtle, allowing for the introduction of painful topics in a gentle, yet honest manner. My job was then to ensure this balance was achieved through my musical and liturgical choices. To accomplish this, I asked her permission to rewrite certain liturgical elements of the service to reflect the morning’s dual themes. In collaboration with Pastor Satre, I altered the Confession and Forgiveness and the Prayers of Intercession. As an example, the left column below is the Confession and Forgiveness for the Sunday of Transfiguration as recommended by Sundays and Seasons, the ELCA’s mainstream resource for worship planning, while the right column is the Confession and Forgiveness I amended for Christ the King’s Mental Health Awareness Sunday.  

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27 For a complete copy of Christ the King’s 2020 Mental Health Awareness Sunday liturgy, please see Appendix E.
Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, the eternal voice from heaven, the anointed and beloved one, the Spirit moving over the waters.

Amen.

As we approach the mystery of God, let us come in confession, trusting the love of Christ crucified and risen.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God who searches us and knows us, you have shown us what is good, but we have looked to other lights to find our way. We have not been just in our dealings with others. We have chosen revenge over mercy. We have promoted ourselves instead of walking humbly with you. With what shall we come before you? Forgive us our sin, and show us your salvation in the face of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Beloved of God, you have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, poured out for you in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Receive the promise of baptism: You are God’s child; ☩ your sins are forgiven. Rejoice and be glad, for yours is the reign of heaven. Amen.

Holy and blessed Trinity, ☩ one God, the voice that spoke to Moses through the fire and cloud, the Son whom God called ‘beloved,’ the Spirit that hovered over the dark waters before light shone over creation, Amen.

As we approach the mystery of God, let us come in confession, trusting the love of Christ crucified and risen.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God who calls each of us Beloved, from the shining stars in the heavens to the tiniest creatures of the deep, you created all living things in your likeness and called the “good.” But in our humanness, we have divided your creation into categories of good and bad, of worthy and unworthy, of abled and disabled, of well and unwell. Gracious Lord, forgive us when we draw lines in the sand between ourselves and our neighbors; for when you walked the earth, you walked alongside those who were different, cast aside, misunderstood, and alone. When our thoughts and actions separate and divide us, extend to us your mercy and grace. And when we find ourselves alone, cast aside, or misunderstood, may the beautiful brightness of your face shine from within us, restoring our hope and freeing us from darkness. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.

Beloved of God, you have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, poured out for you in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Receive the promise of baptism: You are God’s child; ☩ your sins are forgiven. Rejoice and be glad, for yours is the reign of heaven. Amen.
Prayers of Intercession

In both 2020 and 2021, the Intercessory Prayers were altered to draw the gathered assembly’s attention not just to Mental Health Awareness Week but to specific hardships and realities that people with mental illness and their families regularly face. On a typical Sunday, the Intercessory Prayers echo the same topics from week to week: we offer petitions to the church, both marveling at and lamenting our lack of care for creation, the plight of marginalized, sick, and suffering peoples, and thanksgiving for the faithful lives of the saints who have gone before us. These themes are present in the rewriting of the Intercessory Prayers for Christ the King’s Mental Health Awareness Sunday of 2021. However, I altered them to encompass specific topics of mental health to allow the church to reflect upon its role in the advocacy, healing, and liberation of others:

Let us offer God our intercessions for those who, through afflictions of body, mind, or spirit, have lost their health and freedom.

A brief silence.

Today, at the close of National Mental Health Awareness Week, raise in us a greater awareness of the burdens of those who suffer from mental illness and other brain diseases and injuries. Help us to share these burdens with them as they journey through their experiences and seek pathways toward healing and wholeness. Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For all people who live with mental health challenges; that they may be freed from the fears, prejudices, and stigmas that accompany mental illness. May we seek to know and love all people as God’s beloved children first instead of allowing their ailments to define their personhood. We give you thanks, O Lord, that no level of wellness or illness can keep us from receiving your love and grace. Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For the Church, and for all communities of faith who have contributed to the painful hidden histories of people with mental illness; forgive us, gracious God. May our houses of worship be transformed into places of healing and liberation where the entirety of our human experience can be expressed without fear of judgment. Grant us, your servants,
the courage to respond to the needs of others, regardless of our understanding of their diagnoses, with open minds and loving hearts.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For all caregivers, families, and friends who love a person with a mental health problem, may they be sustained by your patience, understanding, and persevering love. Grant them comfort, understanding, and compassion for themselves and for their loved ones.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For those whose lives ended too soon under the weight of mental illness, let your perpetual light shine upon them. May their spirits be free of the hopelessness and despair that plagued them in their earthly lives. As their memory is kept alive in our hearts, dry our tears of sadness and grant them the eternal peace that only you can give.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For all scientists and researchers, all social workers, counselors, and therapists, and all ministers and lay people devoted to the pastoral care of others; may they seek to understand the causes of mental illness in the spirit of mutual love and respect. Reveal to them and their patients the connectedness of body, mind, and spirit.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For the Mental Health Ministries Team at Christ the King and the support groups they offer this community; for the clinical and support staff of Seasons Counseling of Michiana, and for Jody Hughes, Christ the King’s Mental Health Ministries Consultant; guide their ministries in ways that bring hope to individuals, provide support to families, and instill a commitment within this community to the building a network of mental health care that is available and accessible to all.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

For those in this community of faith who need an extra measure of healing in body, mind, or spirit, including those we name aloud or in the quiet of our hearts. Grant them the strength and perseverance they need in the days to come.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

28 For a complete copy of Christ the King’s 2021 Mental Health Awareness Sunday liturgy, please see Appendix F.
Pastoral Partnership: Preaching Perspectives for Mental Health Awareness Sunday

Brad Davick, Associate Pastor at Christ the King, delivered the sermon for our first Mental Health Awareness Sunday in 2020. Pastor Davick is active in the pastoral care ministries of the congregation and serves as a facilitator for both Fresh Hope for Mental Health and GriefShare, Christ the King’s support groups for people navigating mental illness and loss. He is transparent about his struggles with chronic depression. In sharing parts of his story with mental health problems from the pulpit, he opens space for others to openly share their experiences with similar challenges.

The following year, I looked ahead at the preaching calendar and was surprised to see that Pastor Satre was scheduled to preach for 2021’s Mental Health Awareness Sunday. In our initial planning discussions, she initially hesitated to tackle such a topic. After all, as she expressed to me, her husband, Pastor Davick, was the one with the mental health diagnosis. What could she have to offer this discussion? While I appreciated her concern, I encouraged her to consider that her perspective as a loved one of someone with a mental illness was equally important. If one in five people live with a diagnosable mental health problem in any given year, that means that four out of five people do not, meaning, many people in the pews will relate to her story and find comfort in knowing they are not alone in their commitment and concern for their loved one living with a mental health challenge. That Sunday, October 10, 2021, Pastor Satre delivered a sermon that spoke to her experience as a loved one of someone with a mental health condition within the scriptural context of the reading from Hebrews that morning:

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. 29

29 Hebrews 4:14–16 (NRSV).
Pastor Satre preached that sharing our stories in community with each other is an act of mental health justice. May we all approach God’s throne with boldness to find mercy and grace to help ourselves and others in times of need.

**Conclusion: A Mission to Save Lives**

The Chamber Choir (ages 11–14) and the Seraphim Choir (ages 15–18) of the University of Notre Dame Children’s Choir are frequent guest performers at Christ the King’s Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope. In preparation for this event, the musical directors of these choirs facilitate a group discussion about mental health: What is mental health? What does it mean to have a mental illness? How are people with mental illness seen in our society? How can we recognize and help someone who might be in emotional distress? The choristers are given a piece of paper to record their thoughts about these questions confidentially. The directors then collect their responses. For those who wish to share their thoughts, the group discussion continues.

One year, as the musical directors sorted through the written response of their choristers, a note of great concern appeared: “I am having thoughts of suicide. I need help.” The note was not signed, so the directors immediately began to compare the note's handwriting with past written assignments. After conferring with one another and agreeing on who most likely authored the anonymous cry for help, the Artistic Director reached out to his parents with the difficult news. His parents were receptive to their child’s mental health needs and secured an appointment with a local therapist. He eventually received the help and support he needed and continued to sing with the choir for several years after this incident.

While I cannot be entirely sure exactly what it was that made this teenage boy anonymously reach out for help, I hope that singing in the Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope at
Christ the King helped him realize that asking for help with his suicidal thoughts does not distance him from God’s love or the support of his community—his immediate family, his choir family, and his family of faith. What I do know is that this story is a prime example of what can happen when the church purposely facilitates difficult discussions about mental illness through the very reenactment event it has engaged in for hundreds of years: worship.

The act of worship is enabled and upheld by the celebration of the liturgy; through liturgy, a community’s theology is born and developed.30 Much like a congregation’s musical repertoire, a congregation’s ways of engaging in the liturgy as the Body of Christ is a barometer that measures what truly matters to that community of faith. A community of faith committed to the theological work of liberation and justice for all people, including people with mental health problems, will reflect those theological responsibilities through its liturgical life—through word, song, and meal.

The word “liturgy” is often translated as “the work of the people.” However, Catholic priest and theologian Nathan Mitchell argues that liturgy is more accurately interpreted as God’s work for us, not our work for God:

Liturgy is not something beautiful we do for God, but something beautiful God does for us. Public worship is neither our work nor our possession. . . it is opus Dei, God’s work. Our work is to feed the hungry, to refresh the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, to shelter the homeless; to visit the imprisoned; to welcome the stranger; to open our hands and hearts to the vulnerable and needy. 31

If liturgy is something beautiful that God does for us, God, through Jesus Christ, extends the gift of his presence to all people through word, song, and meal. Liturgy is meant for everyone because Christ’s sacrificial love is for everyone. As people of God—as individuals and as faith

communities—it is then up to us to decide how we will respond to the gifts God gives us through what we do with God’s message of love for all creation.

When I made a commitment to seek treatment for my clinical depression and anxiety all those years ago, I never thought I would ever feel grateful for my experience with mental illness. I spent many years trying to ignore it, subvert it, or will it away, yet none of those approaches ever worked. While there is no cure for mental illness, there are ways to manage and relieve the symptoms. In my experience, the most significant healing occurs when I am meaningfully engaged and connected with other people. As a pastoral musician, my response to the gifts God has given me is to use my skills to create the welcome of a healing community for others, especially people living with mental health problems and their loved ones. Therefore, the musical and liturgical choices I make as a pastoral musician and mental health advocate shall:

Befriend people struggling with mental health challenges who are hungry for meaningful relationships.

Support people struggling with thoughts of suicide who are thirsting for the assurance that their life is worth living.

Clothe the broken-hearted and exhausted caregivers with understanding and compassion.

Heal the sick and sorrowful families touched by mental illness by building up a community of support around them.

Shelter those labeled by society as “other” as they search for a purpose and a place to belong; a place where they can safely be themselves.

Liberate those imprisoned by their diagnoses or by the prejudices of others.

Welcome all people—regardless of physical, mental, or emotional disability—into the family of God.
APPENDIX A

6th Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope
Friday, October 4, 2019 + Christ the King Lutheran Church

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

*I Lift My Hands*, by C. Tomlin + Members of XALT!
Rita Kurtz, *soloist*

*When Love Takes Over*
by K. Rowland, D. Guetta, F. Riesterer, M. Nervo, & O. Nervo
The Ripple Effect + Sherry Klinedinst, *director & pianist*

*Balm in Gilead*, arr. by M. Miller
Hillary Doerries, *vocalist*, with Bev Butler, *piano*

THE INVITATION

*Come, Dove of Heaven*, by M. Miller & A. Tice
The Chamber and Seraphim Choirs of the Notre Dame Children’s Choir
J.J. Wright, *director*
with Lorraine Mihaliak, Jude Nwankwo, & Josh Wang, *co-directors*
Trevis Young, *piano*

*Come, Dove of heaven, Breath of peace,*
*sing through us, we pray.*
*Come, Dove of heaven, Breath of peace,*
*sing through us today.*

*Come, Light-Creator, Source of peace,*
*shine on us, we pray.*
*Come, Light-Creator, Source of peace,*
*shine on us today.*

*Breath, Source, and Word, come, God of peace,*
*make us new, we pray.*
*Breath, Word, and Source, come, God of peace,*
*make us new today.*

*Come, Love incarnate, Word of peace,*
*dwell in us, we pray.*
*Come, Love incarnate, Word of peace,*
*dwell in us today*
Please stand as you are able.

+ OPENING HYMN

Come and Find the Quiet Center
TEXT: Shirley Erena Murray (1992)
MUSIC: [BEACH SPRING]; by B.F. White (1844)

Come and find the quiet center in the
Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the
In the Spirit let us travel, open

crowded life we lead, find the room for hope to
heat and slows the pace, God it is who speaks and
to each other's pain, let our loves and fears un-

enter, find the frame where we are freed: clear the
names us, knows our being, touches base, making
ravel, celebrate the space we gain: there's a

chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can
space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the
place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to

see, all the things that really
care, in the Spirit's lively

matter, be at peace, and simply be.
shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.
scheming there is always room to spare!

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WORDS OF WELCOME

Alexandra Sobieski
Executive Director, Seasons Counseling of Michiana

OPENING PRAYER

Pastor Caroline Satre
Senior Pastor, Christ the King Lutheran Church

SONG

*Come, You Disconsolate*, by H. Doerries + Members of XALT!
Hillary Doerries, soloist

Come, you disconsolate, where’er you languish;
come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel.
Here bring your wounded hearts; here tell your anguish;

Earth has no sorrows, earth has no sorrows,
earth has no sorrows that heaven can’t heal.

Joy of the desolate, light of the straying,
hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure;
here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying:

Earth has no sorrows, earth has no sorrows,
earth has no sorrows that heaven can’t heal.

Day after day, night after night,
try as we way, no end in sight.
All of it hard, want to give up,
looking for signs, never enough.
Then, I lean in; what’s that I hear?
“My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Here is the Bread of Life; see waters flowing
forth from the throne of God, pure from above.
Come to the feast of love; come, ever knowing:

Earth has no sorrows, earth has no sorrows,
earth has no sorrows that heaven can’t heal.

TEXT: Thomas Moore (1824), Thomas Hastings (1832), & Hillary Doerries (2019)
WORDS OF REFLECTION

ANTHEM

"Count on Me," by P. Lawrence, A. Levine, & B. Mars
The Ripple Effect + Sherry Klinedinst, 
director & pianist

If you ever find yourself stuck in the middle of the sea,
I'll sail the world to find you.
If you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see,
I'll be the light to guide you.

We find out what we're made of when we are called to help our friends in need.
You can count on me like one, two, three, I'll be there.
And I know when I need it, I can count on you like four, three, two,
and you'll be there, 'cause that's what friends are supposed to do.

If you're tossin' and you're turnin' and you just can't fall asleep,
I'll sing a song beside you.
And if you ever forget how much you really mean to me,
every day I will remind you.

We find out what we're made of when we are called to help our friends in need.
You can count on me like one, two, three, I'll be there.
And I know when I need it, I can count on you like four, three, two,
and you'll be there, 'cause that's what friends are supposed to do.

You'll always have my shoulder when you cry.
I'll never let go, never say goodbye.

You know you can count on me like one, two, three, I'll be there.
And I know when I need it, I can count on you like four, three, two,
and you'll be there, 'cause that's what friends are supposed to do.

You can count me on me, 'cause I can count on you.

WORDS OF REFLECTION

Hillary Doerries, reader
VERSE 1 + Soloist
VERSE 1, 2 & 3 + ALL VOICES

HYMN

When Pain or Sorrow is Too Much to Bear

TEXT: Adam Tice
MUSIC: [ERB]; by Sally Ann Morris

When pain or sorrow is too much to bear,
When God is silent when you need to,
And when it looks like there's no end in bear;
when your heart feels numb, unable to care,
when you hear that you're not alone,
that comfort is near; if
sight, you know all that is wrong
you can still be made right. You're
faith seems so pointless that you cannot pray,
when no one knows you are abandoned when you need a friend,
when all good things
never alone; God has promised to be with us even
just what to say, then hold on,
when we can't see, hold
so
on, to find a way to get through. And when your

hope is gone and you can't hold on,
we will hold on to you.
WORDS OF REFLECTION .................................................. Pastor Caroline Satre, reader

ANTHEM

*In the Morning, In the Evening*, by B. Gaunt & A. Tice
The Chamber and Seraphim Choirs of the Notre Dame Children’s Choir
Erin Wendt, co-director of the Seraphim Choir
Trevis Young, piano

In the morning, in the evening,
God is holding you, holding you.
In the daytime, in the nighttime,
God is holding you still.

Anywhere you may go,
God will go with you.
Anywhere you may go,
You are God’s child.

In the mountains, in the ocean,
God will carry you, carry you.
In the forest, in the cities,
God will carry you still.

Anywhere you may go,
God will go with you.
Anywhere you may go,
You are God’s child.

In the good times, in the hard times,
God will stay with you, stay with you.
In your waking, in your sleeping,
God will stay with you still.

Anywhere you may go,
God will go with you.
Anywhere you may go,
You are God’s child.

Anywhere you may go,
God will go with you.
Anywhere you may go,
You are God’s child.
WORDS OF REFLECTION

Pastor Brad Davick, reader

ANTHEM

Child of God, by M. Miller
The Ripple Effect + Sherry Klinedinst, director & pianist

No matter what people say,
Say or think about me,
I am a child, I am a child of God.

No matter what people say,
Say or think about you,
You are a child, you are a child of God.

No matter what the world says,
Says or thinks about me,
I am a child, I am a child of God.

No matter what the church says,
Decisions, pronouncements on you,
You are a child, you are a child of God.

And there is nothing, or no one who can separate,
They can’t separate you from the truth that you’re someone,
You are family, you are meant to be, a child, a child of God!
You are a child, a child of God!

A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE

At this time, as the music begins, if you would like to light a candle for a friend or loved one who is struggling with a mental health challenge, or for someone in your life who has died by suicide, please make your way to the tables at the back of the sanctuary.

SONG

Nevermore Will the Wind from I Will Breathe a Mountain, by William Bolcom (1991)
Jamie Caporizo, mezzo-soprano with Hillary Doerries, piano

Nevermore will the wind cherish you again,
nevermore will the rain.
Nevermore shall we find you bright in the snow and wind.
The snow is melted, the snow is gone, and you are flown.
Like a bird out of our hand, like a light out of our heart, you are gone.
THE PRAYERS

Pastors Caroline Satre & Brad Davick  
Christ the King Lutheran Church

After each petition, the assembly sings the refrain:

[Music notation]

How long? How long? How much longer must we wait?

THE BLESSING OF OIL FOR ANOINTING

Pastor: We give you thanks, O God, source of life and health. Bless this oil, that all who are anointed with it may be healed, strengthened, and renewed by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Assembly: AMEN.

As the music begins, if you would like to be anointed with oil and receive a blessing for healing, please make your way to the back of the sanctuary where a Pastor will meet with you. All are welcome to receive.

ANTHEM

He’ll Find a Way, by B. Mason & D. Douglas, arr. J. Rouse  
Christ the King’s Sanctuary Choir  
Hillary Doerries, director  
Jim Snodgrass, soloist with Bev Butler, piano

At times the load is heavy;  
At times, the road is long,  
When circumstances come your way  
And you think you can’t go on.

When you’re feeling at your weakest,  
Jesus will be strong.  
He’ll provide the answer  
When you feel all hope is gone.  
He’ll find a way.
For I know if He can paint the sunset
And put the stars in place,
I know that He can raise up mountains
And calm the storm-tossed waves.
And if He can conquer death forever
And open heaven’s gates,
Then I know for you,
I know for you He’ll find a way.

At times, your heart is breaking
With a pain that’s so intense,
And all you hold is broken pieces
to a life that makes no sense.
He wants to lift you up and hold you
And mend each torn event.
He’ll pick up the pieces
That you thought all had been spent,
He’ll find a way.
He’ll find a way.

For I know if He can paint the sunset
And put the stars in place,
I know that He can raise up mountains
And calm the storm-tossed waves.
And if He can conquer death forever
And open heaven’s gates,
Then I know for you,
My God will see you through.

I know for you,
Whatever you may face today,
My God will make a way
I know for you He’ll find a way!
He’ll find a way!

WORDS OF REFLECTION

Alexandra Sobieski, reader
**VERSE ONE – Soloist**

**VERSE 2 – ALL VOICES**

**VERSE 3 – Male voices**

**VERSE 4 – Female voices**

**VERSE 5 – ALL VOICES**

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**Words of Reflection**

Pastor Brad Davick, *reader*
VERSE ONE – Soloist

REPEAT VERSE ONE with ALL VOICES

God remembers pain: nail by nail, thorn by thorn,
hunger, thirst, and muscles torn; God remembers pain.

Time may dull our griefs and heal our lesser wounds, but in eternal love yesterday is now.

God remembers pain,

and pain is in the heart of God.

VERSE TWO – Choir only

God remembers joy: touch of love, taste of food.
All our senses know as good: God remembers joy.
Love and life flow by and precious days are gone
but in eternal love every day is now.

God remembers joy, and joy is in the heart of God.
VERSE THREE – ALL VOICES

God remembers us: all we were, all we are,
lives within our Lover's care; God remembers us.

Time may dull our minds and death will take us all, but in eternal Love every life is now.

God remembers us,

our life is hid with Christ in God.

WORDS OF REFLECTION..........................Hillary Doerries, reader

ANTHEM

I Won't Let Go, by M. Miller
Christ the King's Sanctuary Choir
Erin Wendt, director
Hillary Doerries, soloist with Bev Butler, piano

All my life, all this guilt,
all this grief and shame,
all this night I won't let go
until I know your name,
know your name.

Won't let go, I won't let go,
until you bless me, Lord, I won't let go.
Till you reveal what you would have me do,
my Lord, my God,
I won’t let go of you.
I won’t let go of you.

All this night, all my strength
called on in this place,
I confess, now will you bless,
let me see your face,
see your face - won’t let go,
I won’t let go,
until you bless me, Lord,
I won’t let go.

Till you reveal what you would have me do,
My Lord, my God,
I won’t let go of you.
I won’t let go of you.

Turn around, have you found,
God is always here,
every day, every hour, you must persevere,
turn around, turn around,
God is saying:

I won’t let go!
I won’t let go,
you are my child, I won’t let go.
You are my own and I have shown,
you are my child, I won’t let go of you,
I won’t let go of you.

You are my child, I won’t let go of you,
I won’t let go of you.
You are my child, I won’t let go of you,
I won’t let go of you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Alexandra Sobieski
Executive Director, Seasons Counseling of Michiana

Please stand as you are able.
Bear each other's burdens, share
God calls us to healing, divide.

Each other's suffering, and love as the
Vine love revealing, whenever we see

Savior has shown. The strength of our
caring, healing, expectant, porpoising,

Mercy, expecting, and we are no
bearing, and we are no longer alone.

Anguish and greed. Bear each other's
God calls us to bearing, share each other's suffering, and

Burdens, share each other's suffering, and healing, divine love revealing, wherever

Love as the Savior has shown. Ever we meet human need.
CLOSING PRAYER

Pastor: Creator, God: walk with us as we navigate those in-between spaces that test our faith and stretch our capacity for growth: the known and the unknown, the certain and the uncertain, the well and the unwell, the lost and the found. When the in-between creates fear and confusion in us, stand by us.

Assembly: Lord, stand by us.

Pastor: Gentle Savior, you call us to care for one another in our communities and in our churches; to treat our neighbors with the same dignity and respect that we desire for ourselves. Help us hear your still, small voice; hold our hands and lead us into meaningful relationships with others.

Assembly: Lord, hold us.

Pastor: And now, may the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit + bless us all – those present and those not present this night – who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.

Assembly: Lord, we are your beloved children. Bless us. Heal us. Equip us to go forth to love and serve the world. AMEN.

SENDING MUSIC

Guide My Feet, traditional African American spiritual + Members of XALT!

You are welcome to take your program with you for devotional use. Otherwise, please leave any extras with an usher before you exit the sanctuary.

Please, join us in the Narthex for dessert and fellowship!

Learn more about tonight’s performers:

Hillary Doerries | www.hillarydoerries.com
Music at Christ the King Lutheran Church | www.ctkluth.com/music
Notre Dame Children’s Choir | www.sma.nd.edu
The Ripple Effect | www.rippleeffectchoir.org
Jamie Caporizo | www.jamiecaporizo.com
PERFORMERS

The Ripple Effect + Sherry Klinedinst, director & pianist

SOPRANO
Deb Davis
Lori Wiseman
Adrienne Stokely
Heather Cavanaugh
Jewel Abram-Copenhaver
Lori Weirich
Jo An Schaetzle
Trisha Greenlee

ALTO
Cindy Knaack
Gail Bannister
Jeanie Poston
Michelle Geoffroy
Hillary Doerries

TENOR
Sharon Klinedinst
Dean Vandall
Cathy VanDuyne
Mickey Hay
William Loring
Byron Craft

BASS
Izzy Harbin
Matt Reese
Mick VanDuyne
Mark Abram-Copenhaver
Matthew Grothouse

XALT! + Hillary Doerries, director & vocalist

Augie Freda, guitar
Chuck Trundle, guitar
Dan Chettleburgh, drums
Doug Kurtz, bass
Peggy Sudrovech, piano
Shanon Oldenburg, violin
Andrea Trundle, vocals
Rita Kurtz, vocals
Sue Stewart, vocals
Phil Moore, vocals
THE SANCTUARY CHOIR + Hillary Doerries, Director of Music Ministries
Bev Butler, accompanist
Erin Wendt, ND Sacred Music Intern & Director of Children’s Music

SOPRANO
Julie Bruckert
Amy Dowd
Christine Felde
Cicely Kohlmeier
Tabby Kohlmeier
Lois Kolbe
Kimberly Snyder
Nena Strong
Cookie Zerfas

ALTO
Carmen Burlingame
Nancy Seng
Karen Wendling
Erin Wendt
JoAnne Westerhausen

TENOR
Marcus Felde
Doug Kurtz
Lowell Schlemmer
Merl Wendling

BASS
Will Bruckert
Bob Clausen
Rick Kolbe
Geoff Layman
Phil Moore
John Seng
Jim Snodgrass
Mike Strong

THE NOTRE DAME CHILDREN’S CHOIR + Mark Doerries, Artistic Director
CHAMBER CHOIR
J.J. Wright, interim director, Chamber Choir
Lorraine Mihaliak, Jude Nwankwo, & Josh Wang, co-directors, with Trevis Young, piano
Emma Barkley
Alexander Bauer
Miles Beyerlein
Ariana Bodine
Julia Braun
Liliana Buser
Emma Busk
Isabelle Camilleri
Bridgette Cloud
Madeline Cloud
Casey Dyczko
Ilaria von Eschenbach
Rafael Ferreira
Isabella Ferreira
Noe Ferreira
Isaiah Garvey
Lily Goulding
Elena Gramm
Grace Gramm
Kate Gramm
Ingrid Horner
Stefan Horner
Maureen Hubbard
Brayden Johnson
Catherine Judge
Claire Judge
Samuel Kaufmann
Samara Kelley
Beatrice Kelsey
Benedict Klee
Christy Langhofer
Genevieve Linczer
Andrew Lynn
Gabi Mammolenti
Isabella Mazurek
Madreen Mousaw
Angela Philpott
James Philpott
Leighanna Queen
Rebeca Ramirez
Yofi Sandock
Sarah Sanford
Ellie Satre
Laci Sheppard
Ava Slack
Mae Sollmann
Lorna Wallace
Peter Wallace
Emelia Wetherall-Dehmlow
Chloe Woolet
Emily Zhang
Maximillian Zwicker
Amelia Wenkus

SERAPHIM CHOIR
Erin Wendt & David Marshall, co-directors
Renee Bales
Sarah Barkley
Zach Bauer
Shanon Bodine
Annie Bretz
Molly Burnham
Jade Celichowski
Caitlin Cloud
Marcella Cloud
Volker Cloud
Maria Everett
Lydia Holmes
Benjamin Horner
Philip Hubbard
Tabitha Kohlmeier
Arianna Mammolenti
Moses Mead
Grace Mejer
Mike Richardson
Mackenzie Scott
Seth Stoltzfus
Leo Vesprini
Fiona Wallace
William Wallace
Joyful is the Dark

WORDS: Brian Wren
MUSIC: [HIDDEN GOD], Hillary Doerries (b. 1984)

Joyful is the dark, holy hidden God,
Joyful is the dark, Spirit of the deep,
Joyful is the dark, shadowed stable floor;
Joyful is the dark, coolness of the tomb,
Joyful is the dark, depth of love divine,

rolling cloud of night beyond all naming,
winging wildly o'er the world's creation,
angels flicker, God on earth confessing,
waiting for the wonder of the morning,
roaring, looming thunder-cloud of glory,

majesty in darkness, energy of love,
sheen of midnight, plum-mage black and bright,
never was that mid-night touched by dread and gloom;
ho-ly, haunt-ing beauty,
living, lovin-g God.

Word in Flesh, the myster-y pro-claim-ing,
swooping with the beauty of a ra-ven,
hails the infant cry of need and bless-ing,
darkness was the cradle of the dawn-ing,
Hai-le-lu-jah! Sing and tell the sto-ry.

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Hear My Cry, O God, and Save Me

WORDS: Michael Morgan
MUSIC: [HEAR MY CRY], Hillary Doerries (b. 1984)

Hear my cry, O God, and save me! Troubles and distress enslave me. Day and night I seek your face. Songs revived me. Were your promises in vain?

You, O God, once walked beside me. In the night your heav’n adore you. Thunder rolls and torrents fall

yearning for your light and grace. But these eyes; they cannot see you; outstretched arms; they cannot feel you. Brought redemption; your right hand won our salvation. Stand beside us, there to lift us and to guide us,

My heart breaks in deep despair. I remember deeds of old.

I now, remember me, O Lord. Heir to endless songs of praise!

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Where is the Light When Darkness Falls?

WORDS: Edith Sinclair Downing (1922–2016)  MUSIC: [DONEGAN], Hillary Doerries (b. 1984)

Where is the light when darkness falls
Run as they did in search of life,
God, help us stand beside our friends,

and courage slips away?
the enemy devour'd
a-bandoned, lost, alone.
and never hesitate

Where is the voice to answer them when
the hope and simple trust they had, and
They felt that they must end their life to

no words come to pray?
left them fearful, cow'd.
find, at last, their home.
fore it is too late!
There is in Every Person

WORDS: Adam M. L. Tice (2013)  MUSIC: [CAPACITY], Hillary Doerries (b. 1984)

flute or other C instrument

There_ is in___ ev-'ry per-son ca-pa-ci-ty for
There_ is in___ ev-'ry per-son ca-pa-ci-ty for
There_ is in___ ev-'ry per-son ca-pa-ci-ty for
There_ is in___ ev-'ry per-son ca-pa-ci-ty for

love.

If not to give, then to re-ceive. If not to

trust.

grasp, then to be-lieve.

God’s im-age shapes each
God’s mer-cy seeks each
God’s sto-ry shapes each
God’s vi-sion calls each

one of us, and of-fers Love.
one of us and teach-es grace.
one of us and leads to trust.

Music © by 2018 Hillary Doerries

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God Remembers

WORDS: Brian Wren (1989)  MUSIC: [SWINTON], Hillary Doerries (b. 1984)

God re-mem-bers pain: nail by nail, thorn by thorn,
God re-mem-bers joy: touch of love, taste of food,
God re-mem-bers us: all we were, all we are,

hun-ger, thirst, and mus-cles torn;
All our sen-ses know as good:
Lives with-in our Lov-er's care;

God re-mem-bers pain: Time
God re-mem-bers joy: Love
God re-mem-bers us: Time

may dull our griefs and heal our les-ser wounds, but in_
and life flow by and pre-cious days are gone but in_
may dull our minds and death will take us all, but in_

e-ter-nal Love yes-ter-day is now. God re-mem-bers pain,

e-ter-nal Love ev’ry day is now. God re-mem-bers joy,
e-ter-nal Love ev’ry life is now. God re-mem-bers us,

and pain is in the heart of God
and joy is in the heart of God
our life is hid with Christ in God

Music © 2019 by Hillary Doerries.
APPENDIX C

6th Annual Hymn Festival of Healing and Hope
+ THE SCRIPT +
Friday, October 4, 2019 + Christ the King Lutheran Church

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

THE INVITATION

Come, Dove of Heaven, M. Miller

OPENING HYMN

Come and Find the Quiet Center/S. E. Murray

[BEACH SPRING]

WORDS OF WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER
Loving God,
Tonight, I give you thanks for all of those gathered in this place; for the opportunity to come together as a community of faith to seek more knowledge and understanding around some issues that are both difficult and delicate.

We give you thanks for our physical, emotional, and spiritual health and ask that if or when we fall ill, you would make your peaceful presence known to us. Walk with us, loving God. Help and guide us, and when we’re afraid or hopeless, show us your mercy. Don’t let go of us, O Loving Friend.

Lord, tonight I pray for light in the darkness. I pray that people with vulnerable minds and bodies will find hope and help among their friends, family, caregivers, and community. I pray for acceptance and grace. I especially pray we as your church embrace the opportunity to expand our ministries of care to all people, especially the marginalized, the lost, and the forgotten.

We pray all of this in the name of Christ, the one whose love knows no margins.
AMEN.

SONG

Come, You Disconsolate/T. Moore, T. Hastings, H. Doerries

WORDS OF REFLECTION
One reason we are gathered here tonight is to remember the power of true presence—our ability to genuinely give of our time and attention to other people and other causes outside of ourselves; to stretch ourselves into someone else’s world—to willingly walk in someone else’s shoes—so that, even if only for a moment, we might understand how other people exist and survive in an ever-changing, increasingly challenging world.
Likewise, when an entire community engages in the act of being present to each other, big things can happen. Big, life-changing, transformative things, and I’ve seen it first-hand. I’ve seen the connections that are made between people on a night like tonight:

the anxious, newly-married 20-something who finds an unexpected friend in the crowd;

the teenager who convinces his parents that making an appointment with a therapist is okay and healthy;

the parents who bond over the fact that both of their children are having a hard time in school;

the individuals who will leave tonight’s event feeling a little less alone.

As you know, we are especially present tonight to the care and concern of individuals with mental health challenges. These individuals are people first—despite their mental health diagnosis. They are our neighbors, our colleagues, our students, our friends, and members of our own families.

They are you. They are me.

Tonight, we pause in this present moment as a community and as a church to say to people who live with mental health challenges that we see you, you are important to us, you belong here, and you can count on us.

ANTHEM

Count on Me, P. Lawrence, A. Levine, B. Mars

WORDS OF REFLECTION

We’ve all visited doctor’s offices that have that chart hanging on the wall; you know, the one that’s supposed to help you rate and describe your pain. (SLIDE)

It starts with a smiling, happy face on one end and usually ends with a tearful, frowny face on the other.

Or maybe you’ve been in a mental health professional’s office and have seen something like this (SLIDE). Here we have another chart with various expressive faces designed to help someone attach concrete words to the emotions they’re experiencing.

These things are helpful tools that can provide our physicians with some basic information—a starting point, if you will—but for many of us with mood disorders, sometimes it’s just not that simple. Some days, no matter how hard we look, there’s not one face on those charts that quite gets it right; we have a hard time describing the intricate, complex emotions that we’re experiencing. We may not know where these emotions came from, what may have triggered them, or how long they’re going to hang around—disrupting our lives and our relationships in the process, often in painful ways.
Living with depression or anxiety or other kinds of mental health diagnoses can be exhausting. Navigating a mental health challenge can feel insurmountable, confusing, even hopeless. Overtime, we might feel guilty, or shameful: “Why can’t I just get ahold of myself?” we might ask. “What is wrong with me?” “Will I ever be able to figure this out?”

Luckily, we don’t have to have it all figured out, and more importantly, we don’t have to do it alone. There are people out there, many of whom are present tonight, that are willing to walk with you down a road that can one day lead to possibilities of recovery, healing, and hope. That is what Seasons Counseling and Christ the King Lutheran Church want to do in this community. We want to keep exploring ways that we can further extend clinical services and pastoral ministries of care to those who feel that no one cares. We want to facilitate safe, welcoming spaces where people can gather and form meaningful relationships over things that really matter to them.

So, if you happen to struggle with a mental health challenge; if there ever comes a time when you or a loved one feels like you can’t hold on any longer, let us be the ones that hold onto you. That is what this next hymn invites all of us to do.

**HYMN**
*When Pain or Sorrow is Too Much to Bear, A. Tice/S. A. Morris [ERB]*

**WORDS OF REFLECTION**
There is so much yet to be discovered about the brain.

The brain is alluring, mysterious, and intricate.

- with all of its different parts that control our motor functions;
- the way it enables us to see, smell, taste, and touch the world around us;
- its capability to constantly communicate with other systems in our bodies;
- the way it allows us to experience emotions such as immense joy and incredible pain—sometimes all at once.

For people living with mental health problems, brain diseases, and other neurological disorders, it might feel like the brain plays tricks on us;

- telling us that we are not worthy of love and affection,
- convincing us that no one cares or understands us,
- cruelly making us believe that we don’t deserve to find wellness and wholeness.

Like our kidneys—

- or the heart,
- or the lungs,

our brains can become diseased and afflicted to the point where we might begin to forget who we really are; where we might begin to withdrawal from the things that were once important to us, like our families, our dreams and goals, or our faith in a loving, merciful God.

Our brains—aside from all of their mystery, beauty, and incredible intricacies—
can sometimes make us feel completely and utterly alone. For people whose brains are riddled with depression or anxiety, the relationship with the brain is complicated, uncertain, and isolating.

But here’s the thing: no matter how firmly we believe the lies our brains sometimes tell us; no matter how much we are convinced that we are unlovable or unworthy, no matter how alone we may feel despite that fact that we are surrounded by others –

*God has promised us that he will never leave us.*

In the silence, in the pain, in the loneliness, in the moments where our eyes are wide open in the middle of the day, yet all we see is darkness,

God is *with* us.

God *holds* us,

*carries* us,

and *stays with us* in our darkness,

for each one of us is a child of God.

**ANTHEM**

*In the Morning, In the Evening*, A. Tice, B. Gaunt

**WORDS OF REFLECTION**

No matter what people say or think about me;

No matter what people say or think about you –

You are a child of God.

No matter what the world might say or think about us;

No matter what the church says through the decisions and pronouncements it can make on our behalves –

We are still beloved children of God.

And there is nothing,

or no one,

who can separate you from the truth that you’re someone.

You are family,

you are meant to be,

and you are a child of God.

**ANTHEM**

*Child of God*, M. Miller
A TIME OF REMEMBRANCE

At this time, as the music begins, if you would like to light a candle for a friend or loved one who is struggling with a mental health challenge, or for someone in your life who has died by suicide, please make your way to the tables at the back of the sanctuary.

SONG

Nevermore Will the Wind/H. Doolittle, W. Bolcom

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God of love and mercy,
Tonight, we are gathered here as your church. We pray for its unity and mission, that it may welcome and serve those in its midst who live with any kind of mental health challenge.

Guide us, the citizens and leaders of this land, this state, and this community to act with justice, to love mercy, and to offer kindness when we encounter those who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit.

Forgive us when we knowingly or unknowingly ridicule, neglect, or ignore our brothers and sisters who struggle with mental health challenges. Help us recognize and lift up the person behind the diagnosis. May we honor the stories and experiences that inform their humanity and make them unique, beloved children of God.
Grant patience and courage to the families and friends of those who are learning to navigate their mental health challenge with humility and grace. Guide caregivers of any kind much needed moments of clarity, respite, and self-care amidst their overwhelming feelings of guilt, exhaustion, and anxiety about the future.

Walk with the homeless and missing persons, the destitute, the un-employed or under-employed, the lost and the hungry, the depressed and the anxious, and those who have no access to or cannot afford the healthcare they need. Forgive our indifference, our greed, and the temptation to turn away from the suffering that is all around us.

We ask your mercy and defense for all who are contemplating suicide today, even in this very moment. And for those present tonight whose friend or loved one has died by suicide, bring them your comfort, peace and assurance that their loved one is now in your loving arms – free of pain and covered by your radical gift of grace.

Be with those who conduct research and continue to develop treatments for the prevention and understanding of mental health problems. Walk with therapists, social workers, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, hospital or prison chaplains, and ministers of pastoral care in their interactions with their patients, clients, and parishioners. May they work together to formulate treatment plans that allow individuals to access stability, recovery, and healing.
Lord of all hopefulness,
we ask that you empower us to speak for those who do not have a voice – for those who are victims of prejudice, injustice, and oppression; that we might gain the strength, courage, and resources necessary to begin to break through vicious cycles of economic, social, and spiritual poverty.

Gracious God, Giver of Life,
You can replace our despair with hope.
You can take our sufferings and transform them into unexpected beauty – empathy, understanding, and compassion for others.
You can take our dead-end, rock-bottom ways of living and breathe into us new possibilities and new ways of being alive.
We want to trust that in your time and in your way, you will dispel all darkness with your eternal light, all confusion with your order, and all fear with your peace. We ask all of these things through Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us and reigns in love with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, AMEN.

THE BLESSING OF OIL FOR ANOINTING

Pastor: We give you thanks, O God, source of life and health. Bless this oil, that all who are anointed with it may be healed, strengthened, and renewed by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Assembly: AMEN.

As the music begins, if you would like to be anointed with oil and receive a blessing for healing, please make your way to the back of the sanctuary where a Pastor will meet with you. All are welcome to receive.

ANTHEM

He’ll Find a Way, B. Mason, D. Douglas, J. Rouse

WORDS OF REFLECTION

As we just heard from the words of great American gospel singer, Babbie Mason, God will find a way. God will find a way where there seems to be no way. God works in ways we cannot see—and that includes the work that he does through each one of us.
This is what we at Seasons Counseling and Christ the King believe; that God works through our dedicated, experienced clinical and pastoral staffs to change lives and return hope to those who have lost all hope.

That’s what much of this evening is really about. Tonight, we renew our commitment to each other as a community and as a church to have each other’s backs; to declare that we are a people and a church that cares about people with mental health challenges and the people that love them.

So should the need ever arise for you or a loved one, there are mental health professionals, pastoral ministers, lay caregivers, and a number of other resources available to you should you ever need them.

Tonight, we also pause to acknowledge and give thanks for those people in our lives that hold us up when we can’t quite stand on our own:
- our therapists, counselors, social workers, and spiritual directors;
- our doctors, psychiatrists, and other physicians who supervise and support alternative treatments for mental health challenges, such as TMS and ECT;
- our friends, families, and caregivers of any kind who pour their time, talents, and resources into taking care of others –
  We see you, and we thank you, for it is through you that God holds, carries, and stays with us through our darkest hours.

This next hymn is unique in that it acknowledges and honors those special caregivers in our lives; those who keep vigil at a bedside late into the night; those who often choke back their own needs and their own pain so they can be strong on behalf of someone else.

Tonight, we thank all of those caregivers for teaching us something about sacrificial loving-kindness. I hope you will join me in singing.

**HYMN**

*God Bless the Ones Who Watch and Wait*, S. E. Murray, C. Young  
[O WALY WALY]

**WORDS OF REFLECTION**

As children of God, each one of us held firmly and dearly in God’s memory.

God remembers when we were star dust. He remembers our entry into this world. He remembers with joy the moment of our baptisms – when our hearts were forever sealed with his love, forgiveness, and grace.

God also remembers the agony of being human:  
the sadness at the death of his friend, Lazarus;  
the anger he felt at the sight of greed in the sacred temple;
the disappointment he experienced when in his twelve companions fell asleep after he’d asked for their prayerful presence in the garden of Gethsemane; the betrayal of a trusted friend; and a harrowing death to end all death on the cross.

As children of a God who remembers, we are called to remember one another.

We do this by listening to each other – by hearing the narrative of one’s lived experiences without interruption, agenda, or uninvited opinion; by making space for others at the our tables, and at God’s table.

We also do this by taking a moment to ask ourselves, “Who is missing from our table?”

As a community of faith, we remember this evening what God has done for us; when we fear for our lives, when we seriously doubt that we will ever find our way back home; – that God, in his loving-kindness for each one of us – has already remembered to take away the very thing that is perhaps our greatest fear: that death is the ultimate end.

People living with mental health challenges long to be remembered, too. They want to be seen as God sees them: as beloved, worthy of friendship and other meaningful relationships.

Indeed, friends: God remembers you. No matter where you have been, or what you have done, or what you have left undone in your lives, he remembers you as an irreplaceable piece of his creation, and he delights in you – in all that you were, and in all that you are. Right here, right now.

HYMN

God Remembers, B. Wren, H. Doerries

[SWINTON]

WORDS OF REFLECTION

As this evening draws to a close, I hope you return to your wherever you lay your heads tonight with a renewed sense of hope for tomorrow, an appreciation for the past, and the courage to live into each present moment, however, I know that these things are often “easier said than done.”

And so, if in the future, if you find yourself needing a little more help, guidance, or support in order to face whatever your tomorrows might bring, I hope you will call upon Seasons Counseling of Michiana, or Christ the King Lutheran Church as a source of that support. We believe that it is our call to love and serve the world, and we are here to help.

When I was in graduate school in Bloomington, I somehow found my way to a support group for people living with mental health challenges. We met once a week in the basement of a United Methodist Church. At the time, I had only recently acknowledged my struggles with what I would later discover was clinical depression and anxiety. Finding this support group would have more of an impact on me and my healing process than I would ever know. In hindsight, meeting
with that diverse group of people helped me understand that I was not the only one who dealt with these issues. I needed to hear other people’s stories about their lived experiences with mental illness. I needed to see those people and realize that they were not so different than me. Those people were for a time “my people.” Those meetings gave me a safe, non-judgmental space to talk about the hard stuff.

I tell you this story because as a community of faith, we want to be there for the hard stuff. I tell you this story because support groups like the one I encountered all those years ago are coming to CtK in early 2020. This means that people within our congregation and the Michiana community who are struggling with mental health diagnoses will have an opportunity to ‘find their people,’ just like I did; to hear and share their pain and experiences, and to find a supportive safe haven that offers hope and healing.

And so, beginning in February 2020, Christ the King will offer a support group for individuals with mental health challenges and their families. This group is called Fresh Hope for Mental Health and was started by a Lutheran minister in Nebraska. After coming to terms with his own mental health diagnosis, he decided to start a Christian, peer-to-peer support group that could help people learn how to live meaningful, fulfilling lives despite their diagnoses. Our chapter of Fresh Hope will begin meeting weekly on Tuesday evenings beginning in mid-February and will feature an optional 15-minute service of evening prayer before each session.

Also beginning in 2020 at Christ the King is a group called GriefShare. If you or someone you care about has suffered the death of a friend or family member, a GriefShare meeting is a place where you can come and be with other people who are also making their way through the grieving process. Griefshare seminars and support groups are led by trained facilitators who understand the pain, anger, and emptiness that often accompanies a significant personal loss. Through weekly meetings and other resources, they want to help people recover and rebuild their lives.

As Christ the King continues to take steps to strengthen its mental health ministry, please watch for more information on both Fresh Hope and GriefShare in the coming months. You can find informational pamphlets on your way out this evening, or you can check back on our website or Facebook page for updates.

Both of these groups are intended to be gestures of support, compassion, and understanding; it is our hope that they will invite conversations, inspire informed discussions, and build meaningful connections among those living in our Michiana community. This is just one way that we as church say to you, and to each other: “we won’t let go of you.”

ANTHEM

_I Won’t Let Go_, M. Miller

CLOSING REMARKS

CLOSING HYMN
CLOSING PRAYER

Pastor: Creator, God: walk with us as we navigate those in-between spaces that test our faith and stretch our capacity for growth: the known and the unknown, the certain and the uncertain, the well and the unwell, the lost and the found. When the in-between creates fear and confusion in us, stand by us.

Assembly: Lord, stand by us.

Pastor: Gentle Savior, you call us to care for one another in our communities and in our churches; to treat our neighbors with the same dignity and respect that we desire for ourselves. Help us hear your still, small voice; hold our hands and lead us into meaningful relationships with others.

Assembly: Lord, hold us.

Pastor: And now, may the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless us all—those present and those not present this night—who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.

Assembly: Lord, we are your beloved children. Bless us. Heal us. Equip us to go forth to love and serve the world. AMEN.

SENDING MUSIC

*Guide My Feet (While I Run This Race)*, trad. African American spiritual

>You are welcome to take your program with you for devotional use. Otherwise, please leave any extras with an usher before you exit the sanctuary.

*Please, join us in the Narthex for dessert and fellowship!*
CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH
A congregational of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

17195 Cleveland Road South Bend, Indiana 46635
(574)-272-4306
www.ctkluth.com
Caroline Satre & Brad Davick, pastors
MEDITATION

Please take a few moments to ponder these poetic words aloud or in your hearts before the prelude music begins.

“The Spiritual Procession”
by Susan Palo Cherwien

They lived.
Their lives vibrate in our bones.
Their memories reside inside our cells.
They lived.
Their footsteps ring beneath our feet.
Their voices are alive in the walls.
Their light lights our way.
We are not alone.
They lived.
The procession
spirals and winds
before us
They, the vanguard
Their songs on our lips
their poems in our hearts
their wisdom, our guide
their failings our warning
we do not travel alone
the procession winds
and spirals
around us
deeper.
deeper
into God.
They, the forerunners
deeper.
deeper
into God—
the procession
home.

PRELUDE

In This Darkness, by John L. Bell
Hillary Doerries, vocalist

In this darkness I do not ask to walk by light;
but to feel the touch of your hand
and understand that sight is not seeing.

In this silence I do not ask to hear your voice;
but to sense your Spirit breathe
and so bequeath my care to your keeping.

In unknowing I do not ask for fearless space;
but for grace to comprehend
that neither you nor I are diminished.

In this death I do not ask to forfeit pain;
but to gain the strength to love
through loss and cross the bridge of waiting.

Text based on a poem by Pat Bennett © 2001

**WELCOME**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Leader: Lord Jesus, we gather this evening as a people acquainted with loss and grief.
   Our burdens sit heavily on our chests and in our hearts.  
   *(Matthew 11:28-29)*

All: Come, Lord Jesus, for your burden is light.

Leader: Lord Jesus, look with mercy upon the troubles and afflictions of your people.
   Consider with compassion the depth of our sorrow.
   *(Psalm 10:14)*

All: Come, Lord Jesus, for your burden is light.

Leader: Lord Jesus, we are the broken-hearted, the lonely, and the lost.
   Bring us healing and bind up our wounds.
   *(Psalm 147:3)*

All: Come, Lord Jesus, for your burden is light.

Leader: Lord Jesus, this evening, may your holy presence pierce through our darkness.
   Ease the inner thoughts and feelings that overwhelm us.
   Accept our tears as offerings; hold us as we weep.
   *(Psalm 61)*

All: Come, Lord Jesus, for your burden is light.
OPENING PRAYER

God of mercy,
hear our prayers during this season of Advent.
Listen to the inner murmurings of our hearts
as we confront painful memories from Christmases past.
Grant us strength and courage to face
the loss, grief, separation, or crippling stress
that take us right back to that place where the sun never seems to rise,
where the wind is never at our backs—
where we cannot even remember what hope feels like.
Lord Jesus, restore our hope;
Bring us peace for the past.
We ask these things in the name of Christ Jesus,
Who shares our life of joy and sorrow,
of death and new birth,
of despair and promises.
Amen.

HYMN

O God, We Pray for Those in Pain
Verses 1 & 2 by Edith Sinclair Downing; Verse 3 by Edmond Sears
sung to the tune of It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
The First Reading

Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

Word of God. Word of Life.
Thanks be to God.

THE GOSPEL

Luke 2:1-14

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke.
Glory to you, O Lord.

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,

praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!
"

The Gospel of the Lord.
Glory to you, O Christ.

REFLECTION

Pastor Brad Davick

Silence follows the reflection for personal prayer & meditation.
Leader: We light this Advent candle to remember those we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us not just during this season, but forever.

All: May God’s eternal love surround them.

Please, sing as you are able:
Silent night, holy night,
all is calm, all is bright
‘round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Leader: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands you will place the gift of your peace.

All: Refresh, restore, and renew us, O God, and lead us into your light.

Please, sing as you are able:
Silent night, holy night
griefs abound, ever in sight,
Christ now comes in the manger bare,
Holds our loved one in his holy care.
Joy, at last, to be ours.
Joy, at last, to be ours.

Leader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past few weeks, months, or, for some of us, years of pain and suffering that we’ve endured. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, and the hurts of reflecting upon our own mortality.

All: Let us remember that dawn defeats the darkness.

Please, sing as you are able:
Silent night, holy night
shepherds quake at the sight,
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing alleluia.
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Leader: This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope that God offers to each of us in the story of his birth. We remember that God, who shares our lives with us, promises us a place and time where pain and suffering are no more.

All: Let us remember the One who shows us the way and goes with us into our tomorrows.

Please, sing as you are able:
Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love’s pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Leader: Let us pray. God, we come to you as Christmas dawns with pains growing inside us. As the nights have grown longer, so has the darkness wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of our longest nights, we offer to you the pain in our hearts, the traumas that some of us cannot even put into words but are nonetheless known to you. Loving God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your merciful love, answer us.

Leader: Compassionate God, there are those who grieve things that might have been. A death or loss has forever changed their experience of Christmas. We also grieve tonight for those plans and dreams that may have died—
For those who have lost their life or their health to COVID-19;
For those who choose to remain isolated in their homes this Christmas,
unable to safely gather with friends and family;
For those who know the searing pain of infertility or miscarriage;
For those who are stuck in relationships that are destructive or abusive;
For those who have been furloughed and lie awake at night wondering how they’re going to feed their families;
For those who live with a mental illness and have lost hope;
Loving God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your merciful love, answer us.

Leader: The Christmas season reminds us of all that used to be and cannot be anymore. The memories of what was, the fears of what may be, stifle us. All around us we hear the sounds of celebration. But all we experience is a sense of feeling blue. Please, be near us this night. Loving God, hear our prayer.

All: And in your merciful love, answer us.
**SPECIAL MUSIC**

*We Wait for You,* D. Bjorlin & R. Sensmeier

*In our deepest grief,*
*we wait for you.*

*In our unbelief,*
*we wait for you.*

**Refrain:**
*We wait for you,*
*we wait for you.*

*Hope of all creation,*
*we wait for you.*

*Through a stream of tears,*
*we wait for you.*

*Through a maze of fears,*
*we wait for you.*  *(Refrain)*

*When we feel alone,*
*we wait for you.*

*When the way's unknown,*
*we wait for you.*  *(Refrain)*

*Till you right each wrong,*
*we wait for you.*

*Till we all belong,*
*we wait for you.*  *(Refrain)*

**LITANY FOR THE NIGHT**

Leader: Lord, it is evening. The darkness thickens all around us, and we wonder again:

All: How will we survive another long night?

Leader: Lord, despite your promise that you will never leave us, in the dark corners of our homes, our hearts cry to you:

All: How long will loneliness be our only companion?

Leader: Lord, remind us again of the hope, love, joy, and peace that this season of Advent brings.

All: May the hope, love, joy, and peace of Christ reign in our hearts forever.

Leader: And finally, Lord, strengthen us for our journeys. Empower us with the notion that we are all survivors because we worship a God who survived the pains of being human: who confronted the vast darkness of the world while hanging on a cross,
who returned to earth bearing holy scars of suffering before ascending to heaven, and whose divine brokenness we remember as we partake in the gifts of bread and wine:

“This is my body,” said our Lord, “broken for you.”

All: Though we, too, are broken, we humbly rejoice, even in darkness.

+++ + +++

The service ends in silence.
You may now extinguish your candles or remain in sanctuary for additional prayer and meditation.

SUPPORT RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH:

GRIEFSHARE:
GriefShare is a friendly, caring group of people who will walk alongside you through one of life’s most difficult experiences. You don’t have to go through the grieving process alone. GriefShare seminars and support groups are led by people who understand what you are going through and want to help. You’ll gain access to valuable GriefShare resources to help you recover from your loss and look forward to rebuilding your life.

For more information visit: www.ctkluth.com/griefshare or call the church office: (574) 272-4306

FRESH HOPE FOR MENTAL HEALTH:
Fresh Hope is an international network of peer-to-peer Christian support groups for those living with a mental health diagnosis and their families. At the core of Fresh Hope is the belief that it is possible to live well in spite of having a mental health challenge. Fresh Hope creates a safe, encouraging, honest environment where real hope and healing can take place. Consider joining us for a meeting.

Tuesdays, 6:30 – 8:00 PM
CtK Youth Room

For more information visit: www.ctkluth.com/freshhope or call the church office: (574) 272-4306.

SEASONS COUNSELING OF MICHIANA:
Seasons Counseling is located on the campus of Christ the King Lutheran Church. Seasons is proud to offer a full range of counseling services and is happy to assist you in determining if your health insurance will cover the cost of therapy. If you lack insurance or your insurance will not cover the cost of therapy, you may qualify to receive assistance through the Client Assistance Fund.

Seasons Counseling can be reached by calling (574) 277-0274.
Transfiguration of Our Lord and Mental Health Awareness Sunday

Christ the King Lutheran Church
Sunday, February 23, 2020
Welcome to Christ the King Lutheran Church
17195 Cleveland Road, South Bend, IN 46635
(574) 272-4306 Website: www.ctkluth.com
Senior Pastor: Caroline Satre            Pastor: Brad Davick
csatre@ctkluth.com                      b david@ctkluth.com

Our Clergy Couple Pr. Caroline Satre and Pr. Brad Davick hope to greet you this morning. Please take a few minutes to talk with them immediately following the service.

Pastoral Care: If you would like a pastoral visit, hospital visit or pre-surgery visit, please call the office at (574) 272-4306 during the week (M-F, 8 am—4 pm), or contact Pastor Brad through his cell phone at (847) 271-1413.

We are thankful you are here today and welcome you in the name of Christ. This morning’s Liturgy will last approximately 65 to 75 minutes.

Christ the King celebrates Holy Communion at each Sunday worship service.
All baptized Christians, regardless of denominational affiliation, are invited to receive Holy Communion here.

Large print worship folders and hearing assistance devices are available from the ushers.

Children of all ages are encouraged to participate in worship according to their abilities. Activity bags can be found at the entrance of the sanctuary. Keep any decorated coloring sheets, but please return the bags with everything else you found in them.

A nursery is available in room 401, immediately to the left outside the sanctuary, where parents may take infants to children age 4 yrs. When the nursery is staffed, you may sign your child in with the childcare provider.

Whether you are a visitor or a member, please fill out the navy friendship pad and pass it on to others in the pew next to you, then return it, noting who is sitting with you whom you may not know. Introduce yourself after the service.

Thank you for silencing all cell phones and watches during worship.

If you are looking for a church home, please consider making our family your family. Our faith community is a blessing in our lives, and it is a privilege to share God’s work by serving our greater community. We are excited about our church and we would love to have you become part of it. To officially join or simply connect more fully email connection@ctkluth.com.
LITURGY FOR HOLY COMMUNION
Sunday, February 23, 2020
8:15 and 11:15 am
Transfiguration/Mental Health Awareness Sunday

Today we remember when Jesus was revealed as God’s beloved Son on that high mountain. As his heavenly Father echoed the words of his baptism, Jesus was transfigured. He was changed. And while we know how the story goes - that this is only the beginning of Jesus’ walk to the cross - as we silence our Alleluias for the upcoming season of Lent, we are also filled with the possibility that we, too, might be changed; that we may be led out of the shadows and into the light of Christ - the hope of the world.

† GATHERING †

Prelude

Jesus Loves Me with Children of the Heavenly Father,
arr. by Janet Linker & Jane McFadden,
The Alleluia Ringers with Mary Trimboli, flute, and Bev Butler, piano

Welcome

During announcements, please pass the friendship book (the navy folder) found at the end of your row. If you are visiting, please fill in whatever information you would like our church office to have.

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Holy and blessed Trinity, one God,
the voice that spoke to Moses through the fire and cloud,
the Son whom God called ‘beloved,’
the Spirit that hovered over the dark waters before light shone over creation, Amen.

As we approach the mystery of God, let us come in confession, trusting the love of Christ crucified and risen.

Silence is kept for reflection.
God who calls each of us Beloved,
from the shining stars in the heavens to the tiniest creatures of the deep,
you created all living things in your likeness and named them “good.”
But in our humanness, we have divided your creation into categories of good and
bad, of worthy and unworthy, of abled and disabled, of well and unwell.
Gracious Lord, forgive us when we draw lines in the sand
between ourselves and our neighbors; for when you walked the earth,
you walked alongside those who were different, cast aside, misunderstood, and
alone. When our thoughts and actions separate and divide us,
extend to us your mercy and grace.
And when we find ourselves alone, cast aside, or misunderstood,
may the beautiful brightness of your face shine from within us,
restoring our hope and freeing us from darkness.
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord,
AMEN.
Beloved of God,
you have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God,
poured out for you in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Receive the promise of baptism:
You are God’s child; † your sins are forgiven. Rejoice and be glad, for yours is the
reign of heaven. AMEN.

GATHERING HYMN

Jesus on the Mountain Peak
RED BOOK #317

GREETING
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

CANTICLE OF PRAISE

Glo - ry to God in the high - est, and peace -
_ to God’s peo - ple on earth._
Verse 1

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father. We worship you, we give you thanks. We praise you for your glory. R

Verse 2

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father. Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. R

Verse 3

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord. You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen! Amen! R
PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud declaring Jesus your beloved Son, you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us heirs with Christ of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
AMEN.

The people are seated.

YOUNG PEOPLES’ MESSAGE (11:15)

† WORD †

THE FIRST READING

EXODUS 24:12-18

At Mount Sinai, Moses experienced the presence of God for forty days and forty nights. The “glory of the LORD” settled on the mountain, and on the seventh day God called out to Moses. On the mountain God gave Moses the stone tablets inscribed with the ten commandments.

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.”

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Word of God. Word of life.
Thanks be to God.
PSALM

REFRAIN

In your light, O God, we see light.

VERSE:

5 Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds.
6 Your righteousness is like the strong mountains, your justice like the great deep; you save both man and beast, O LORD. Refrain

7 How priceless is your love, O God! Your people may take refuge under the shadow of your wings.
8 They feast upon the abundance of your house, you give them drink from the river of your delights. Refrain

9 For with you is the well of life; and in your light we see light.
10 Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, and your favor to those who are true of heart! Refrain
At the transfiguration, God's voice was heard declaring Jesus to be the beloved Son. By the activity of the Holy Spirit, God's voice continues to be heard through the word of scripture.

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Word of God. Word of life.
Thanks be to God.

The people stand.
THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

5
Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia.

9
Lord, to whom shall we go?

13
You have the words of eternal life. Al-le-lu-ia.
THE GOSPEL

Matthew 17:1-9

Shortly before he enters Jerusalem, where he will be crucified, Jesus is revealed to Peter, James, and John in a mountaintop experience of divine glory called the transfiguration.

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

1Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

The people are seated.

SERMON

Pastor Brad Davick

Silence for reflection, then the people stand.
HYMN OF THE DAY  When Pain or Sorrow is Too Much to Bear

When pain or sorrow is too much to bear; when your heart feels numb, unable to care, when faith seems so pointless that you cannot pray, when no one knows

When God is silent when you need it to bear; when you're not alone, comfort is near; if you are abandoned when you need a friend, when all good things never alone; God has promised to be with us even

And when it looks like there's no end in sight, know all that is wrong can still be made right. You're just what to say, then hold on, hold on, to find a way to get through. And when your

When hope is gone and you can't hold on, we will hold on to you.

WORDS: Adam Tice; MUSIC: Sally Ann Morris
THE APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
    creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
    who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
    born of the Virgin Mary,
    suffered under Pontius Pilate,
    was crucified, died, and was buried;
    he descended to the dead.
    On the third day he rose again;
    he ascended into heaven,
    he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
    and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
    the holy catholic church,
    the communion of saints,
    the forgiveness of sins,
    the resurrection of the body,
    and the life everlasting.
    Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Trusting that God hears us, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence for reflection.

Holy God, lover of justice, your equalizing power is at work among us. Rouse and embolden your church, that we might be transfigured to be a light in the world for those who are trapped in the darkness or lost in the shadows.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Awesome God, creator of all good things, you speak and the earth trembles. You display your majesty in the mountains and your mystery in the clouds. Grant that we discover your magnificence in all of your created world.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.
Compassionate God, gentle Spirit, earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot heal. You take what humanity deems unworthy and unlovable and transform it into something beautiful. Teach us how to use our pain to help others find their way out of the darkness.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Loving God, giver of grace, you rejoice when your people take care of one another in loving kindness. Be in the midst of our church as we forge ahead on the journey of loving and serving the world. Bless those who care for others, and bless emerging community ministries such as GriefShare and Fresh Hope.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Gracious God, wounded healer, in you, there is no darkness at all, for you are a refuge for all who are neglected and abused, forgotten and misunderstood, lonely and abandoned. Bring freedom to those who are oppressed and give comfort to those experiencing pain of any kind, including...

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Mighty God, heavenly King, you made your dwelling place at the top of a mountain with Jesus and his disciples. Dwell also in this congregation, that all who enter this community might be welcomed and transformed by your dazzling brilliance and radiant love.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Everlasting God, beyond all time and space, you offer eternal life to all your children. Thank you for the witness of those who lived and died in the faith, for what they in their wisdom have taught us about generosity, forgiveness, and second chances.

Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Confident that you are able to accomplish more than we even dare to ask, we bring these prayers before you, believing in your saving grace revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.
† MEAL †

THE OFFERING

Cash offerings not in an envelope, or “loose,” during the month of February will go to Busy Hands of Michiana, an award-winning, all-volunteer, non-profit, charitable organization. A variety of items are handcrafted for people of all ages in the community who struggle with Alzheimer’s, autism, cancer, disabilities, homelessness, and other life-challenging situations. Contact information: email at office@busyhandsofmichiana.org or phone 574-234-2515.

GATHERING THE GIFTS

Concertato on Beautiful Savior, arr. by Robert Hobby,
The Sanctuary Choir with Mary Trimboli, flute, and Bev Butler, organ

Please join the choir on verses 1 and 4:

1. Beau - ti - ful Sav - ior, King of cre - a - tion,
4. Beau - ti - ful Sav - ior, Lord of the na - tions,

Son of God and Son of Man!
Son of God and Son of Man!

Tru - ly I’d love thee, Tru - ly I’d serve thee,
Glo - ry and hon - or, Praise, ad - o - ra - tion,

Light of my soul, my joy, my crown.
Now and for - ev - ver - more, be Thine!
PRESENTING THE GIFTS

The people stand and sing as the gifts are brought forward.

The Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise God,
creatures, here below. Praise God above all heavenly
hosts; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Therefore
may we ever sing alleluias to our King.

THE OFFERING PRAYER

God of wonder,
you formed us in our mother’s womb,
and from mother earth you bring forth this bread and wine.
We place them on your table,
together with our lives and all that you have made.
Open the heavens to us and pour out your Spirit.
We wait for your mercy;
we long for your peace;
we hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ,
our banquet of life.

AMEN.
THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

P: \[ \text{The Lord be with you. And also with you.} \]

All: \[ \text{Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord.} \]

P: \[ \text{Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is} \]

All: \[ \text{right to give our thanks and praise.} \]

...and join their unending hymn:
HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Lord God of hosts, Heaven and earth are
full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest!

The WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.
The people are seated.

HOLY COMMUNION

All baptized Christians are invited by Christ, the host, to participate in Communion. Please come forward by way of the center aisle and stand at the chancel steps. Receive the bread in your hand, then lift the cup from the tray. White grape juice is available in the center of the tray.

At 8:15, place your empty cup in the basket as you return to your seat by way of a side aisle. At 11:15, after the acolyte collects your empty cup, then return to your seat by way of a side aisle. Young children and others who do not yet receive Holy Communion may come forward to receive a blessing with the laying on of hands.

Gluten-free wafers are available for those who need them.

LAMB OF GOD

Je-sus, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sins of the world. Have mercy on us.

Je-sus, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sins of the world. Have mercy on us.

Je-sus, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sins of the world. Grant us your peace.
COMMUNION MUSIC

Here I Am, Lord, arr. by John Carter
Mary Trimboli, flute, with Liz Bell, piano

COMMUNION HYMN

Lord of All Hopefulness

After all have communed, the people stand.

RED BOOK #765

THE TABLE BLESSING

THE PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Faithful God, you have kept your promise to us in this meal, nourishing us with the gift of salvation. Now send your servants forth in peace, that we may testify to your goodness and share the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. AMEN.

† SENDING †

SENDING HYMN

Light Dawns on a Weary World

RED BOOK #726

Blessing

May Christ, the wisdom and power of God, and the source of our life together, keep you united in mind and purpose. And the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the † Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you always.

AMEN.

DISMISSAL

As the body of Christ,
We are called and sent to love and serve the world.

Go in peace. Let your light shine.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Hillary Doerries, organ

You may take your worship folder with you for devotional use or return it to the ushers.
APPENDIX F

October 10, 2021
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Worship Folder

CHRIST the KING
LUTHERAN CHURCH
17195 Cleveland Road • South Bend, IN 46635
574.272.4306 • www.ctkluth.com
Senior Pastor: Caroline Satre • csatre@ctkluth.com
Pastor: Brad Davick • bdavick@ctkluth.com
Today’s Worship + What to Expect

Welcome to worship at Christ the King! Today’s worship includes more liturgical elements than last summer; however, it still has less than pre-pandemic. Because the Church Council continues to follow the guidance of scientists in order to ensure the health and safety of our worshippers and the wider community, our time together today will include the following:

1. As of September 12, masks are now mandatory for anyone age 2 and up regardless of vaccination status.
2. Social distancing between individuals or family units will be in effect in the sanctuary. Alternating pews will be roped off, but worshippers are otherwise welcome to choose their seat.
3. Congregational and group singing is allowed. Please add your voice to today’s worship!
4. If you would like to receive Holy Communion, please come forward when directed by the ushers. At the 8:15 am worship service, communion will take place around the altar. Participants will be offered bread (or a gluten-free wafer upon request) and wine or grape juice. At the 11:15 am service, as the pastor holds out a tray, please take the pre-packaged wafer and juice (gluten-free wafers and juice are available in the wooden bowl). Return to your seat, remove your mask and consume the elements.
5. An offering plate is available as you exit the sanctuary. Donations in an envelope or clearly marked “general fund” will support the ministry of CtK. August & September’s undesignated cash or “loose” offerings went to Madison STEAM Academy’s (a.k.a Madison Primary Center) “Food 4 Kids Backpack Program”. October’s undesignated cash or “loose” offerings will go to Seasons Counseling Center’s Client Assistance Program. Seasons believes in the multi-disciplinary approach—incorporating the mind, body, and spirit—and works together with health care providers to offer exemplary service to their clients.
6. Please recycle worship folders and dispose of communion supplies (if applicable) in the proper bins as you exit the sanctuary.
7. Socializing before and after the service is encouraged and may occur indoors. Thanks be to God!

We need you!

Weekly services don’t happen on their own — they require dedicated teams of volunteers every week. So, if you’re eager to be back in the sanctuary, we encourage you to fill out our online form at ctldluth.com/volunteer or contact the church office and let us know how you can help. We need ushers, greeters, readers, audio and video assistants (now more than ever), drive-in parking lot attendants, and more to help make this all happen. Please consider “loving and serving the world” in this way.
LITURGY FOR HOLY COMMUNION
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 10, 2021
8:15 am and 11:15 am

This morning we celebrate Mental Health Awareness Sunday as a gathered community of faith. We acknowledge that mental health challenges can leave us feeling broken and hopeless. Christ the King Lutheran Church believes that no one should have to experience the devastation of any affliction of body, mind, or spirit alone, for meaningful healing happens in community with one another. May the spirit of God’s love and grace fill our hearts as we remember that God not only sympathizes with our weakness, but transforms our darkness into a beacon of light for others. Thanks be to God!

† GATHERING †

PRELUDE

Holy God, We Praise Thy Name, arr. by Paul A. Tate
Hillary Doerries, piano

WELCOME

Connection cards are located in the pew pocket in front of you. If you are visiting or your contact information has changed, please fill out the front portion of the card. If you would like someone or something lifted in prayer, please fill out the back portion of the card. Place completed cards in the offering plate in the narthex.

The people stand.
Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, whose love for us is immeasurable, whose peace is beyond our understanding, and whose gift of grace renews us every morning.

Amen.

Let us confess our sins to the one who welcomes us with an open heart.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of all hopefulness,
You know our needs before we ask,
and in our asking you prepare us to receive your gift of grace.
Let us open our lives to your healing presence,
forsaking all that separates us from you and our neighbors.
Let us be mindful not only of our sins,
but also of the communal sins in which we play a part.

Friends in Christ,
By the gift of grace in Christ Jesus, you are forgiven and loved exactly as you are.
Rejoice with gladness of heart, and become for one another ministers of God’s grace.

Amen.

freely forgiven
Gathering Hymn

God of Freedom, God of Justice

God of freedom, God of justice,
You whose love is strong as death,
You who knew the price of faith;
sad oppression, power of pity.

Rid the earth of torture’s terror,
You who saw the tears and blood.
You who shed the race or creed.
fully human, Restless for the common good.

Make in us a captive conscience,
You whose hands were nailed to wood;
You who cried of pain and protest.
Open to each other’s need.

Quick to hear, to act, to plead;
Make us truly sisters, brothers.
Move in us the teaching of God.

5
PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God who cares for us, grant us the gift of acceptance; that we might find the courage to cope with mental illness, or any other disease of body, mind, or spirit. Teach us the patience and understanding our brothers and sisters with mental illness need and deserve. Help us not to judge or dismiss our neighbors whose circumstances we may not understand, but show us ways to give and receive love. Grant us wisdom to be instruments of your grace and peace.

AMEN.

The people are seated.

† WORD †

YOUNG PEOPLES’ MESSAGE (11:15)

THE FIRST READING

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Amos was a herdsman by profession and a prophet by God’s call. During a time of great prosperity in the northern kingdom of Israel, the prophet speaks to the wealthy upper class. He warns his listeners that fulfilling God’s demand for justice brings blessing, while corruption and oppression incur God’s wrath.

6 SEEK the LORD and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

7 Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!

10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

11 Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them;

(Continued on page 7)
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.
12 For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.
13 Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;
for it is an evil time.

Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,
just as you have said.
15 Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Word of God. Word of life.
Thanks be to God.

Psalm 90:12-17

Refrain

Teach us to know the shortness of our days;
may wisdom dwell within our hearts.

So teach us to number our days
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.
13 Return, O Lord; how long will you tarry?
Be gracious to your servants. Refrain

(Continued on page 8)
(Continued from page 7)

14 Satisfy us by your steadfast love in the morning;  
so shall we rejoice and be glad all our days.
15 Make us glad as many days as you afflicted us  
and as many years as we suffered adversity. Refrain

16 Show your servants your works,  
and your splendor to their children.
17 May the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us;  
prosper the work of our hands; prosper our  
handiwork. Refrain

THE SECOND READING

HEBREWS 4:12-16

We cannot hide our thoughts, desires, and actions from God, to whom we are completely accountable. Nevertheless, Jesus understands our human weakness and temptations, because he also experienced them. Therefore we can approach the throne of grace to receive divine mercy from Christ.

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.
14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Word of God. Word of life.
Thanks be to God.

The people stand.
The Gospel Acclamation

Al-le-lu-ia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Al-le-lu-ia. Al-le-lu-ia.

The Gospel

Mark 10:17-31

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark.
Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus has been teaching his disciples about what is most valued in God's eyes. Now, a conversation with a rich man brings his message home to the disciples in a way that is surprising but unforgettable.

17 As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” 20 He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing: go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” 28 Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or

(Continued on page 10)
sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good
news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sis-
ters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal
life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

The people are seated.

SERMON

Pastor Caroline Satre

After a brief silence for reflection, the people stand.

HYMN OF THE DAY

God, Help Your Church to Learn

Verse 1:

God, help your church to learn our
God, help your church to see de-
God, help your church to pray that
God, help your church to say: there

Verse 2:

fear gives no permission to blame those with a
spair knows only bleakness, and help us try to
those with silent sadness will know there is no
is no need for hiding; so all may find a

Song continued on next page.
THE APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead; On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us offer to God our intercessions for those who, through afflictions of body, mind, or spirit, have lost their health and freedom.

A brief silence for reflection.

Today, at the close of National Mental Health Awareness Week, raise in us a greater awareness of the burdens of those who suffer from mental illness and other brain diseases. Help us to share these burdens with them as they journey through their experiences and seek pathways toward healing and wholeness.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

(Continued on page 12)
(Continued from page 11)

For all people who live with mental health challenges; that they may be freed from the fears, prejudices, and stigmas that accompany mental illness. May we seek to know and love all people as God’s beloved children first instead of allowing their ailments to define their personhood. We give you thanks, O Lord, that no level of wellness or illness can keep us from receiving your love and grace.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For the Church, and for all communities of faith who have contributed to the painful hidden histories of people with mental illness; forgive us, gracious God. May our houses of worship be transformed into places of healing and liberation where the entirety of our human experience can be expressed without fear of judgment. Grant us, your servants, the courage to respond to the needs of others, regardless of our understanding of their diagnoses, with open minds and loving hearts.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For all caregivers, families, and friends who love a person with a mental health problem, may they be sustained by your patience, understanding, and persevering love. Grant them comfort, understanding, and compassion for themselves and for their loved ones.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For those whose lives ended too soon under the weight of mental illness, let your perpetual light shine upon them. May their spirits be free of the hopelessness and despair that plagued them in their earthly lives. As their memory is kept alive in our hearts, dry our tears of sadness and grant them the eternal peace that only you can give.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For all scientists and researchers, all social workers, counselors, and therapists, and all ministers and lay people devoted to the pastoral care of others; may they seek to understand the causes of mental illness in the spirit of mutual love and respect. Reveal to them and their patients the connectedness of body, mind, and spirit.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For the Mental Health Ministries Team at Christ the King and the support groups they offer this community; for the clinical and support staff of Seasons Counseling of Michi-

(Continued on page 13)
ana, and for Jody Hughes, Christ the King’s Mental Health Ministries Consultant; guide their ministries in ways that bring hope to individuals, provide support to families, and instill a commitment within this community to the building of a network of mental health care that is available and accessible to all.

Lord, in your mercy, 
**Hear our prayer.**

For those in this community of faith who need an extra measure of healing in body, mind, or spirit, including... Grant them the strength and perseverance they need in the days to come.

Lord, in your mercy, 
**Hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Special Music**

*(8:15)*: *Leftover People in Leftover Places*, arr. by Hillary Doerries  
Hillary Doerries, soloist

*(11:15)* *Leftover People in Leftover Places*, arr. by Hillary Doerries  
The Sanctuary Choir with Hillary Doerries, soloist

Le...
these are the ones in God's upside-down kingdom
these are the Christ in their shabby disguise,
these are the least and the highly unlikely,
given a hope and new light in their eyes.

Could there ever be any doubt;
the things our faith would have us live out?
Should we all be up to the task,
then may we act before others ask.
Let's feed the hungry, bring water to the thirsty,
    invite the stranger to dine;
clothe the naked, take care of those who struggle,
spend time with those who are locked up inside.
All you do for those leftover people,
    Jesus said, “You do it for me.”

Here is God's testing of true Easter people,
spirited people with service to give,
taking to heart the compassion of Jesus,
feeling how others must struggle to live,
we are a part of God's upside-down kingdom,
we know the heart of the gospel's demand,
taking our part with the leftover people,
widening the space of the lines in the sand.

† MEAL †

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up our hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

...and join their unending hymn:
The Words of Institution

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.

The people are seated.
**HOLY COMMUNION**

If you would like to receive Holy Communion, please come forward when directed by the ushers.

At the **8:15 am** worship service, communion will take place around the altar. Receive the bread in your hand, then lift either the wine or grape juice (in glass cup) from the tray. Place your empty cup in the bowl as you return to your seat by way of a side aisle.

At the **11:15 am** worship service, as the pastor holds out a tray, please take the pre-packaged wafer and juice. (Gluten-free wafers and juice are available on the table as you enter the sanctuary. Please bring it with you for a blessing.) Return to your seat, remove your mask and consume the elements.

At both services, young children and others who do not yet receive Holy Communion may come forward to receive a blessing with the laying on of hands.

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**COMMUNION MUSIC**  
*Just As I Am, Without One Plea*  
**RED BOOK #592**

The people stand.

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**THE TABLE BLESSING**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Lord of life,  
in the gift of your body and blood  
you turn the crumbs of our faith into a feast of salvation.  
Send us forth into the world with shouts of joy,  
bearing witness to the abundance of your love  
in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.  
**Amen**.
† SENDING †

Sending Hymn

Faith Begins by Letting Go

1 Faith begins by letting go, giving up what had seemed sure,
2 Faith endures by holding on, keeping mem’ry’s roots alive
3 Faith matures by reaching out, stretching minds, enlarging hearts,

taking risks and pressing on, though the way feels less secure:
so that hope may bear its fruit; promised, our souls will thrive,
sharing struggles, living prayer, binding up the broken parts;

pilgrimage both right and odd, trusting all our life to God.
not through merit we possess but by God’s great faithfulness.
till we find the commonplace ripe with witness to God’s grace.
Blessing

People of God,
as we prepare to leave this place,  
remember the words of the prophet Isaiah:
“The Spirit of God is upon us because we have been anointed
to bring good news to the oppressed,
to heal the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and to comfort all who mourn.”

We thank you, God, for the opportunity
to provide care and comfort
to those in need of healing.

Help us remain strong in our desire to welcome the stranger,
to seize every opportunity to bring comfort to the afflicted,
and to never lose our capacity to show concern for others.

Now receive the blessing:
You are indeed Christ’s body,
bringing new life to a suffering world.
The holy Trinity, one God,
bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

As the body of Christ,
We are called and sent to love and serve the world.

Go in peace. The living Word dwells in you.
Thanks be to God.

Please use the receptacles in the narthex for trash and recycling. The pastors look forward to greeting you as you exit the sanctuary.

Postlude                                   Warum soll’ ich mich den grämen
                                         (Why Should I Then Grieve?), Johann Walther
                                         Hillary Doerries, organ
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