

Presbytery of Boston COM
Mental Health and Congregational Life

Beginning in September 2018, COM is offering a series of four workshops, led by Dr. Susan DeHoff, concerning how mental health concerns impact congregational life.

Research has shown a need for pastor support and training in the area of coping with various mental health issues that arise in congregations. The need is in at least three broad areas: (1) how to provide care for parishioners exhibiting possible mental health problems; (2) how to work those with diagnosed problems, who may or may not have outside professional help, into the life and fellowship of congregations; and (3) how to address issues of disharmony and/or division in a church brought about at least in part by various personality issues.

To begin addressing these needs, the following four, 1 ½ hour workshops are being proposed, to be held in various locations around the presbytery to facilitate participation.

Workshop I will be a discussion/information gathering opportunity for pastors to share specific examples of situations within their congregations. Both problems as well as methods employed to address them (successful and unsuccessful) could be discussed. It is expected that confidentiality would be strictly respected.

Workshop II will focus on clinical signs of anxiety and depression (particularly what to look for that requires psychological/medical intervention) and on how faith can be useful in addressing these issues. The goals of this workshop would be (1) to increase awareness of symptoms requiring clinical attention before a crisis is reached and (2) to develop methods for responding to these issues that utilize faith.

Workshop III will focus on personality issues that present significant challenges to congregational life. These are issues that cause disruptions and disharmony in local congregations. The goals of this workshop would be (1) increased awareness of what personality problems look like and (2) increased awareness of how to limit or remove their impact on congregational life without marginalizing those who cause disruptions.

Workshop IV will look at the various kinds of faith experiences parishioners might report and pastoral care responses to those experiences. Research has shown that parishioners not infrequently report profound faith experiences, some of which may be healthy and some of which may be unhealthy. The goals for this workshop would be (1) to distinguish healthy from unhealthy experience using Reformed theology beliefs and (2) to increase awareness of how healthy faith experience can be encouraged in both those with diagnosed mental illness and those not so diagnosed.

Group size will be kept to not more than 12, and the meetings will be held in as central a location as possible. Given enough participation, there is potential to hold meetings in two different locations on different days. Please sign up using the sign-up sheet on the Sign In table or contact Susan at sldehoff@verizon.net.