**FCN Thoughts: The Merry, Merry Month of May**

The month of May brings many merry things to our attention. May brings National Strawberry Month; Intergalactic Star Wars Day; National Motorcycle Awareness Month and National Chamber Music Month. May also brings us Mental Health Awareness Month, which may not feel so merry, but perhaps as we look at ways to reframe our thoughts and actions, we can help ourselves and others to begin to see anew.

Our mental health is a part of who we are. “Mental Illness” is normal. Often those who are diagnosed with mental illness often feel different, separate, apart from the norm. Nothing could be further from the truth. A recent study found only 17% avoided mental illness, while 42% identified a short-lived mental illness and 41% had a mental health condition that lasted many years. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, with anxiety and substance abuse not far behind—and this was pre-COVID! Mental health is a part of your brain and your brain is a part of your body. The two are forever linked. The ways we treat our bodies affect our brains. The reverse is true as well. The environment we grew up in and exist in today, as well as coping we learn from those around us affect our mental health. However, though we know there is a biological component, we also know treatment and self-care may direct people toward mental wellness.

Mental Health Awareness Month brings us an opportunity to begin the conversation around mental health, to be kind to ourselves and others as we deal with life’s challenges, and let others know they are not alone. The stigma surrounding mental illness creates isolation and feelings of shame and makes it difficult for people to seek the support they need to get better. Up to two thirds of those who are suffering never seek treatment. So, what can each of us do this month to participate and bring about change?

1. **Share Your Story:** Keep the topic of mental health in the conversation. When you share your struggles and victories it helps others to see and believe they are not alone and there is hope. Share only what you are comfortable sharing with those you are comfortable sharing it with.
2. **Educate Yourself on Mental Health and Wellness:** Learn about mental health and wellness topics such as how to incorporate good self-care habits into your life or about specific mental illnesses you do not understand. Learning about mental illness and how it affects sufferers helps you have more empathy and decrease stigma that shrouds these diagnoses. These websites may be a good start <https://nami.org> or [https://www.nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/).
3. **Talk to a Therapist:** Locate a therapist to address any mental health challenges you currently are facing. These challenges may be anxiety or depression, troubled relationships, or other struggles you are facing in life or the feeling you are stuck in a rut. Many will set up video visits if you desire
4. **Focus on Self-Care:** Sufficient sleep, healthy food, regular activity are each important. In the same way, taking time for enjoyable interests are essential to our mental health, helping to re-energize us and help us focus on the good things of life. Contact the Faith Community Nurse to help support you in these activities.
5. **Support Those Around You:** Consider how you can support others. Mental health issues may be difficult to see with our eyes, but as we learn about symptoms, we may be able to identify problems those we care about may be facing. It does not mean you are responsible for fixing anyone, nor should you try to, but rather to be available to provide support in ways the person may identify. Make sure they know they are not alone.

“Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.” Proverbs 12:25. I pray we can all find “a good word” in support of our families, friends, neighbors and ourselves.