

TX. SUICIDE PREVENTION SYMPOSIUM

Panel: Upstream Suicide Prevention

Topic: How Our Faith Communities Can Help

Presenter: Rev. Susan Hawkins Sager (Contact: rev. susan.sager@gmail.com)

... Our faith communities offer an important, though often underutilized, resource in suicide prevention.

... Participation in a faith community lowers an individual's risk factor for suicide. Research has substantiated this, although we do not know whether it is because of the spirituality or the community support or both.

... We must create and implement a suicide prevention strategy on levels: Youth groups, religious school staff, pastoral care staff and groups associated with pastoral care, such as Stephen Ministry.

... Most people have no idea what to do in a mental health crisis. Yet if they witnessed a physical emergency, they would know, at the very least, to call 9-1-1. This general lack of knowledge and the fear need to be addressed.

... It is useful to approach suicide prevention within the much larger context of mental health issues. There is tremendous anxiety surrounding the topic of suicide for individuals, families and friends. As faith communities, we also need to address and eliminate the lingering stigma about mental illness.

... This Presenter worked closely on mental health education with a large church (3,000 congregants) in Austin. Her work included a session with the pastoral care team and two sessions with the Stephen Ministry.

... Several years ago, this Presenter pioneered organized a conference in Austin entitled, "1 in 4 of Us: An Interfaith Response to Mental Illness" that included a range of clergy and congregants who shared their experiences. NAMI Austin has expanded on this theme with their annual interfaith conference, "Out of Exile."

..."CPR in a Mental Health Crisis" is offered here for you to give to individuals and groups as a reminder about how to respond in a mental health emergency.

CPR in a Mental Health Crisis

What would you do in a mental health crisis ? Most folks would *not* have a clue. Yet, mental health is every bit as important as physical health to well-being. CPR is a popular acronym for a well-known emergency medical procedure. It also provides an easy way to remember how to assist in a mental health crisis.

C – Create a Connection

Center yourself before your encounter

Check in with the other person

Convey caring and concern

Care for yourself as well; arrange debriefing for yourself afterwards if necessary

P – Provide a Presence

Presence that accepts people where they are, affirms their worth and validates their feelings

Provide comfort, calm and compassion

Proactive listening – listen receptively to what is said and how it said; allow time for silence and for the other person to process what they feel

R – Recognize and Respond

Risk assessment: Determine if the person is at risk for self-harm or suicide or poses a risk to others

Report any perceived risk to the person's family and/or a professional

Reassure the person that help is available and that they do not have to face the situation by themselves

Refer to professional help as well as other sources of support; provide information

REMEMBER ... You are *not* going to solve this crisis. However, your presence is a powerful reminder that no one has to go it alone.

Copyright 2013 by Susan Hawkins Sager

Created for the New Milestones Foundation, a partner with Austin Travis County Integral Care