

He has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

The 2021 ELCA social message, “The Body of Christ and Mental Illness” challenges us to create a powerful example within the whole body of Christ as we accompany and affirm those in our midst who live with mental illness

WHEREAS, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that 1 in 4 adults experiences mental illness in a given year and 1 in 17 adults live with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depression, post-partum depression or bipolar disorder: and

WHEREAS, approximately 20% of youth ages 13 to 18 and 13% of youth ages 8 to 15 experience severe mental disorders in a given year; and

WHEREAS, Stigma is when someone, or even you yourself, views a person in a negative way just because they have a mental health condition. Some people describe stigma as a feeling of shame or judgement from someone else. Stigma can even come from an internal place, confusing *feeling* bad with *being* bad (NAMI.org); and

WHEREAS, the stigma associated with the disease of mental illness is identified as the primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease; and

WHEREAS, the Stigma-Free Campaign aims to inspire the public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of the disease of mental illness, and create a culture wherein family, friends, neighbors, all peoples who have the disease of mental illness feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma; and

WHEREAS, promoting awareness that there can be no “health” without mental health will break down barriers and encourage all people to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed; and

WHEREAS, local congregations can support persons with mental illness in seeking resources to treat the disease of mental illness so no one person needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless; and

WHEREAS, establishing Stigma-Free Zones will raise awareness of resources and encourage people to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired, and tragedies are avoided; and

NOW THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED that new Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recognizes the community mental health needs and supports the efforts of all to reduce the associated stigma and shame by designating the New Jersey Synod as a Stigma-Free Zone and challenge each of the congregations and ministries of the New Jersey Synod to do likewise -be Stigma Free.