

GC Task Force for C034: Ministry with Individuals with Mental Illness and Their Families

April 5, 2019 Meeting (4:00pm – 5:30pm Eastern)

Attending: David Gortner (chair), Susan Phillips, Jeanine Driscoll, Amanda Henes, Robert Phillips, Eva Warren, Charles Zimbrick-Rogers, John Stewart, Alice Webley

Unable to attend: John Tarrant (co-chair), Brandon Beck, David Bailey

Summary

Meeting began with welcome and prayer.

Members re-introduced themselves to the group, with opportunity for fresh introductions for members just joining this time.

Group reaffirmed best meeting time as the last Tuesday of the month. Group also discussed and agreed on desire for possible face-to-face conference meeting over two days. There was much support for this idea, and an affirmation of the value of face-to-face, sustained time to meet and work. Gortner agreed to set up the regular meetings with the GC Office, and to find out more about possibilities for drawing on funds allotted (\$30,000 as indicated in resolution) for one conference meeting.

Group briefly reviewed the prior meeting summary as posted and approved the minutes.

Subgroups reported their progress to date.

- Data/Stories – group connected by email, shared ideas, created a spreadsheet, shared database sources as resources, considered best ways to gather info & insights from churches & dioceses
- Stigma & Advocacy – group met (both members in NAMI), put together some biblical resources & prayers, found article resource, posted “stigma-free church” Power-Point
- Defining Mental Illness/Health – no report yet
- Theologies Relating to Mental Illness – no report yet
- Distinctions & Intersections – group connected by email, exchanged some initial ideas, started a document

Group Times for monthly meetings – group agreed to last Tuesdays each month, 5:30pm – 7pm, starting April (July or August off). Meetings will be scheduled for 4/30, 5/28, 6/25.

Gortner requested discussion about roles and functions needed for the Task Force, including a note-taker / secretary role (shared rather than permanent). Gortner agreed to post a sign-up sheet. Susan suggested possibility of one of the member bishops assigning an assistant (staff member) to take notes. Sign-up sheet will include 2 rotating roles: Secretary (to record meeting notes and summary), and Temperature / Tone Gauge (to ensure shared participation and to check on people’s sense of conversation).

Group discussed use of allocated \$30,000, as outlined in Resolution text. Group affirmed first use of this money for a 2-day face-to-face consultation and working session. Group also indicated interest in other potential use of resource funds (including training, resource deployment [web, publication, etc.]). One possible use of funds could be in partnership with dioceses and networks that would carry this Task Force’s energy and work forward beyond the triennium (e.g., Episcopal Mental Illness Network, Union of Black Episcopalians’ Mental Health Task Force 2016). An additional interest was in accessing some funds for some data collection and story collection, to help identify congregations and groups that are doing noteworthy work in mental health ministry.

Subgroup reports followed:

- **Defining – Jeanine, Alice** – Some good resources and draft material are emerging, with Jeanine's guidance. Alice has begun collecting lay definitions of mental health / mental illness. In discussion, it was suggested that some common definitions from different leading organizations and agencies be provided (e.g., NAMI definition, APA dictionary definition, MHFA definition, etc.). Group emphasized need for definitions to be without jargon, and in language that most people can understand. Group discussed that it might also be helpful to have "legal" or state-based definitions, along with the purpose these definitions serve.
- **Reading & interpretation of the Bible re: mental health/illness – Robert, Amanda, Brandon** – The team has begun to assemble initial resources, including biblical stories and characters that may best exemplify how mental illness was understood and illustrated in the scriptures. Robert is also bringing resources from his DMin project (including an exercise of writing one's own lament psalm, a theology of institutionalization, and an image of church as "God with skin on").
- **Theological perspectives – Jeanine, Brandon, David** – The team has posted some initial ideas and Jeanine has begun to flesh out a document. Jeanine asked how the group feels about working from liberation theology and sacramental theology perspectives. John noted value to be drawn from monastic theology frameworks, from rules of life and manners of prayer. Susan reminded the group of C034's ties to the Jesus Movement and the *HOW* – emphasizing the need to keep practical resources, strategies, frameworks as the primary goal.
- **Data & stories – David, Charles, Eva** – The team began a spreadsheet to put together data on mental illness in general and in some specific categories, on prevalence in the population, lifetime incidence, and impact in people's lives. The team has begun to collect and collate data from different web-based sources and publications. Amanda raised a question for future discussion: How MH/MI is discussed during discernment processes.

Google Docs Folder and documents: Group recognized challenge of working on documents together, in the static space of the GC Extranet. Group approved use of Google Docs for shared document work on all working drafts and notes, with an understanding that complete drafts in semi-final, near-final, and final form be posted on the GC Extranet. Gortner agreed to set up a Google Docs folder with sub-folders for documents to be posted. Group agreed that all documents be accessible by all Task Force members, but that team members take responsibility for first-draft work and other members comment only once there is some "meat" of content put together by team members.

Next tasks – Group agreed to the following reports & drafts to produce by next meeting:

- **Data/Stories** – fill in more of spreadsheet with prevalence and other data, consider costs of gathering and recording/transcribing stories (and possible partners in data collection), discuss more about what we want from dioceses in terms of data and stories.
- **Definitions, Distinctions/Integrations, Theology** – try out a one-pager format for a few key themes, ideas, and definitions – tie the ideas to the "so what" of ministry in relation to mental illness.
- **Stigma & Education/Advocacy** – do a one-pager as well – also do some more gathering of ideas and practices on advocacy and "moral suasion."
- **Bible & interpretation** – hone in on and narrow down a list of 3-5 biblical characters and stories to flesh out (and what has/hasn't changed in realities, challenges, and social responses to mental health)

Meeting concluded with prayer.