

**Unit 5** We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Mental Health Workshop

We're guessing that you at least know something about mental health. You might even be trained in Mental Health First Aid, QPR, or a similar response program. Chances are, you've experienced some mental health challenges yourself. Even with all that, our churches aren't always the best places for experiencing a mental illness or for talking about mental health. It's not supposed to be that way. Churches are meant as places of sanctuary where it is safe to talk about real-life challenges or to be accepted as who we truly are—mental illnesses and all. We're challenging you to plan a mental health workshop for your church. NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and their collection of **excellent resources** is a great place to start for helping a church to better care for people experiencing mental illness or trauma.



## **What does a Mental Health Workshop have to do with Boundless Promise?**

When Jesus talks to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, he is providing care for her soul and for her mental health. Martha, in this moment, is experiencing deep grief and the trauma of loss. Jesus' promise to Martha takes full account of what she is feeling. It's pretty clear that Jesus is feeling a lot of the same distress himself. Planning or participating in a Mental Health Workshop is like making an open promise to all those around that you care about how people are really feeling and are committed to learning more and caring better.

## **Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:**

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be planning and then hosting a Mental Health Workshop.

- 2) Dedicate some time to exploring the resources offered by NAMI or another organization.
- 3) Plan a Mental Health Workshop to inform people in your church about mental illness and to equip them with tools and guidance for care and support. As NAMI recommends, you should only hold a workshop led by a mental health professional. The page on NAMI's site entitled "How to Be Inclusive and Welcoming" offers an excellent list of topics to ask a mental health professional to cover in a mental health workshop. It is essential that no one goes into the planning or hosting of a workshop thinking they can fix mental health or that people experiencing mental illness are even somehow broken. Jesus—our Lord and savior and the most brilliant person who has ever lived—did not try to fix Martha or treat her like she was broken. He loved and accepted all of who she was in that moment and offered affirming and uplifting words that he backed up with action. None of us can care for someone experiencing a mental illness or trauma by resurrecting their loved one, but we can plan or take part in a workshop to keep ourselves informed and equipped.

### **Who should be helping to lead this project?**

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you must invite a mental health professional and consider inviting your deacon or pastor, your outreach or service board committee chair, and your faith formation or Christian Education committee chair. Mental health education is faith formation.

### **How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?**

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to be a place where people can go to talk about and receive care for mental health challenges. Talk about whether the time spent on this project is worth even just one person feeling that the church understands them and cares about their struggles. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but this is not an easy subject to talk about and we'll need to do this carefully and respectfully so I'll need your help and maturity, but it will all be worth it because we are leading our church to be a place of God's **Boundless Promise**."