



One in four

Mental health matters!

by Carla Quenet



As one in four struggle with mental health issues, Carla Quenet describes the Church's role and response.

Boldness and strength come in many forms and guises. Supporting and speaking out about issues of mental ill health can require immense strength and profound confidence. To be strong about such issues isn't offering an illusion of wellness nor is it about easy fixes, rather it's being honest even at the risk of being vulnerable, being willing to listen attentively and resolving to make a difference.

I am passionate about this issue as from personal experience and through journeying with close family and friends, I recognise first-hand the devastating effect mental ill health can have on individuals and those who care for them.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought pain and devastation to

so many, but I have also noticed glimmers of hope. They include people:

- Thanking others for their contribution to society
- Becoming genuine friends with neighbours
- Taking the time to ask 'How are you?' and waiting to hear a frank reply.

The pandemic has been for many a dreadful experience yet it has also been a catalyst, encouraging individuals to be sincere about their mental health and wellbeing.

It's essential to have meaningful conversations about mental health, to listen to individuals and to provide gentle care. Informed and non-judgemental listening is vital, alongside a willingness to 'walk alongside' people, feeling the blisters of their journeys as we travel together.

TACKLING THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILL HEALTH

People often describe how speaking out about their compromised mental wellbeing takes immense courage. I delight in the increased media coverage around wellbeing but despair at the underlying stigma and misconceptions associated with mental ill health. As one in four adults in Great Britain experience mental ill health each year, we will come into contact with it regularly and knowing how best to respond is vital.

I firmly believe that the Methodist Church must engage with the task of destigmatising mental ill health. Having a better grasp of what is it, and indeed, what it is not, is essential. I am thrilled that the Methodist Church in Britain is helping resource the training of a number of mental health first aid instructors, who in turn will roll out

training enabling individuals to become mental health first aiders. This training is about equipping people to respond positively, and in my experience it:

- Creates a culture that is more accepting of mental health issues
- Provides individuals with more confidence to deal with issues
- Highlights when medical intervention is critical and signposts where to find it
- Provides a better understanding of others' mental health.

Importantly the training helped me to better understand my own mental health.

CHURCH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECTS

The way we embrace and support people living with mental ill health within the life of our Church speaks volumes. Across the [Methodist] Connexion I have noticed various ways this is happening, including the Church leading and funding school projects promoting self-esteem and positive mental health

and wellbeing. Mental health teams have been invited to support students and staff in educational establishments at times of crisis, for example a team was invited to support a college community after a student died by suicide. Other church initiatives include:

- Wellbeing officers to encourage the holistic wellbeing of a community
- Listening services, such as those supporting the bereaved
- Peer support groups
- Services such as dementia awareness training and dementia cafés to support individuals with specific needs and their families and carers
- Projects to reduce social isolation for people of all ages
- Wellbeing projects using techniques such as massage and mindfulness
- Counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy services delivered by qualified professionals.

These projects are examples

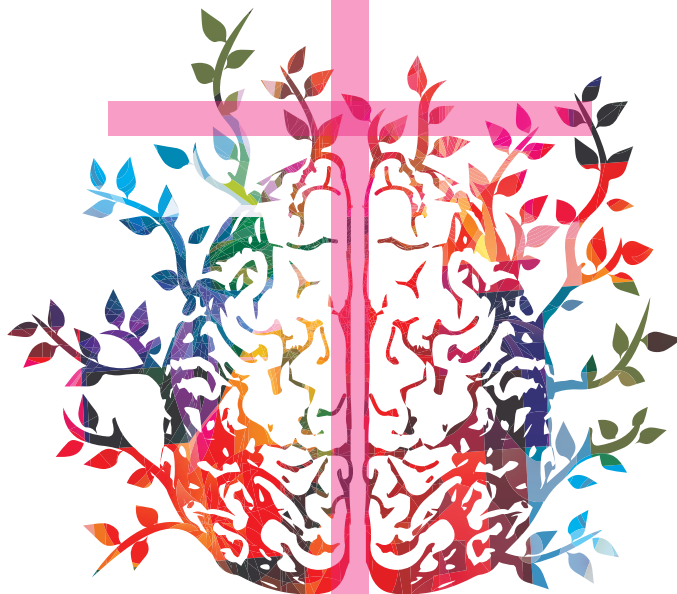
of individuals being given the opportunity to speak out about diminished wellbeing. They take the daring step of engaging with people who are often shunned by their community and seek to make a positive and life-transforming difference to them.

I rejoice that the Methodist Church is promoting positive mental health and wellbeing but let's not pretend the task is complete. We need to continue to listen to voices such as 3Generate, which keep such matters on our agenda.

I hope and pray we will always be a Church that nurtures emotional resilience, inspires and promotes positive wellbeing and mental health practices and seeks always to support and encourage everyone. May the Methodist Church be known as a Church that strives to promote positive mental health and wellbeing with boldness and strength.

In your context what is the best way to embrace and support people living with mental ill health?

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[Methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/supporting-wellbeing-through-mental-health-first-aid-training](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/supporting-wellbeing-through-mental-health-first-aid-training)