

Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder– working to erase the stigma of mental illness

Susan Gregg-Schroeder, pic courtesy Mental Health Ministries

In recent years much has been done to de stigmatise the language used around mental health and in Australia we have wonderful organisations like [Beyond Blue](#), [The Black Dog Institute](#) and [Sane](#) to name just a few doing wonderful work.

Yet the stigma sadly remains. Perhaps it is the nature of the mental health illnesses– however I continue to be a little amazed not to find our faith based bodies embracing the importance of mental health awareness in a much more pro-active way. If you think about it, the church regardless of denomination has a real role to play in mental health education and in de stigmatising mental health issues.

One woman who has experienced first hand the pain of mental health through her our journey with depression is Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder who founded the US based [Mental Health Ministries](#) in 2001.

Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder founded Mental Health Ministries to provide educational resources to help erase the stigma of mental illness in our faith communities. As a consumer, she also educates doctors, therapists and other mental health care providers to understand the important role a person's spirituality can play in the recovery and healing process.



Susan is also an author. Her best known book is [In the Shadow of God's Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression](#), published by [The Upper Room](#). This book shares her very personal story as she has struggled with severe depression. Susan and her husband were interviewed for the ABC-TV documentary, [Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness](#).

Today, Mental Health Ministries has evolved into an ecumenical and interfaith outreach. It works with faith communities, advocacy groups, community organizations and mental health professionals. The focus is on using one's faith and spirituality as an important part of the recovery and treatment process and as a way for family members to find strength and hope in caring for a loved one with a mental illness.

The focus is on spirituality and mental illness rather than a particular faith tradition. A distinction is made between spirituality and religion. Spirituality springs from a belief system that gives meaning to our lives. It grows out of our experience rather than doctrine. Religion, on the other hand, refers to a faith community grounded in a set of beliefs, practices and a shared history such as churches, mosques, temples, etc.

Mental Health Ministries provides resources for faith communities that can be adapted to each congregation based on the needs and makeup of the worshipping community.

Mental Health Ministries has been designated as an "Advance Special" of the [California-Pacific Conference](#) of the [United Methodist Church](#).

Let's meet Susan

"As a United Methodist Minister and a person who has struggled with depression, I started Mental Health Ministries with a vision of producing high quality resources to reduce the stigma of mental illness in faith communities.

"I experienced first- hand the reluctance of our faith communities to talk about or to minister to persons with a mental illness and their families.

Too often mental illness is thought of as a moral or spiritual failure rather than a treatable illness. Many persons with a mental health issue will go first to their clergy or faith leader. But studies show that many clergy are not effective in providing the support and referrals that individuals and their families need.

"Helping faith communities become caring congregations is my passion. The response I receive from groups

using our resources to educate about mental illness is overwhelming. I've had the privilege of speaking at conferences and seminars nationwide to give the message that hope and recovery are possible. When mental illness is openly discussed, people will come out of the shadows.

"It is my prayer that our congregations will be there to surround them with the care and compassionate support. Hope is a gift our faith communities can give to all of us who struggle with mental health issues".