

Resolution on Suicide Prevention

General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2000

“Resolved, That the 73rd General Convention adopt and affirm the resolution on Suicide Prevention by the Diocese of West Tennessee at its 19th convention, March 25, 2000:

1. We affirm our belief that, as St. Paul teaches (Romans 8:39), ‘Nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’
2. We pledge ourselves to collaborate with other religious bodies and secular agencies in educating ourselves to recognize and minister more appropriately to those among us who are especially at risk of suicide as well as those who are impacted by the suicide of others; and
3. We urge that all levels of the Episcopal Church, parochial, diocesan, and national, accord high priority to the prevention of suicide in prayers and programming.”

General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Denver, 2000 (New York: General Convention, 2001), p. 173.

Prayer for Those Touched By Suicide

Holy Father, we pray the words of Psalm 34:18: “The Lord is close to the broken hearted, and saves those crushed in spirit.” We thank you for your steadfast and life-giving love. . To this love and care we commend all those overcome by the chaos around them and the torment within them. We pray that all those who sought relief by their own hand will know the comfort of your eternal presence, where you wipe away every tear and where there is no sorrow.

We ask your comfort to all those whose lives have been touched by the pain of suicide, that you would lighten their darkness and bring them out of their distress.

We ask that you touch all our hearts with your love and compassion, allowing it to overflow through us, touching the hearts of others. Give us grace to care for one another: forgiving all, sharing all, and striving to always radiate your loving presence in our pain filled world. Uphold us, enfold us, and sustain us with the joy and comfort of your never ending peace and never ceasing love.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our salvation. Amen. - *The Reverend Bernadine Craft (2014)*

Who Is at Risk for Suicide? What Are the Warning Signs?

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself.
- Looking for a way to kill oneself such as searching online or buying a gun.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.

- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.

These signs may mean that someone is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if a behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)

The Experience

“Some people assume that a common reason people kill themselves is to get attention, but the most common reason people attempt to kill themselves is that they want to escape intense psychological pain.” Karen Mason

“No single theory will untangle an act as ambiguous and with such complex motives as suicide.” Alfred Alvarez

“Sometimes you literally cannot make it on your own, and you need to borrow from the faith of those around you. In the community of faith, we need to stand as hopeful people for the suicidal person who no longer believes that anything can ever get better again.” Kathryn Greene-McCreight

“The pain of severe depression is quite unimaginable to those who have not suffered it, and it kills in many instances because its anguish can no longer be borne. The prevention of many suicides will continue to be hindered until there is a general awareness of the nature of this pain.” William Styron

“What I had begun to discover is that mysteriously and in ways that are totally remote from normal experience, the gray drizzle of horror induced by depression takes on the quality of physical pain. But it is not an immediately identifiable pain, like that of a broken limb. It may be more accurate to say that despair, owing to some evil trick played on a sick brain by the inhabiting psyche, comes to resemble the diabolical discomfort of being imprisoned in a fiercely overheated room. And because no breeze stirs this cauldron, because there is no escape from this smothering confinement, it is entirely natural that the victim begins to think ceaselessly of oblivion.” William Styron

“When a suicide-related crisis occurs, friends and family are often caught off-guard, unprepared and unsure what to do. The behaviors of a person experiencing a crisis can be unpredictable.” National Alliance on Mental Health

How Can the Church Help?

“With God’s help, as bearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ, we will

Invite and listen deeply to the stories of everyone we encounter;

Name and celebrate stories of the presence of God in Christ everywhere;

Share our stories of encounter, good news, and resurrection in Jesus;

Plant seeds of hope, and trust God to give the growth.” - *Evangelism Charter for the Episcopal Church*

“The focus tends to be on the suicidal person – as well it should be – but the family may not get the support they need. And the less help they receive, the less energy they have for helping the suicidal person.” Karen Mason

“That many people were knocking on God’s door for me strengthened me in my putting up with the disease and sped the healing, even though the full healing was not an immediate reality. Maybe a degree of healing would never have come if people had not been praying.” Kathryn Greene-McCreight

“I think it is a good idea for all clergy to keep an updated list of therapists and psychiatrists whom they have vetted in advance.” Kathryn Greene-McCreight

“Veterans do not need more barbecues picnics, or trips to amusement parks. What we do need is community, connection to ourselves, to each other, and to God. The Church is the best organization to do this.” David W. Peters

“In the past 20 years, there has been escalating research focusing on the relationship between various dimensions of religiosity and mental health. To date, several thousand studies demonstrate positive associations between the two. Results indicate that those who are more religious generally fare better in terms of mental health.” Simon Dein

“Suicide seems to be one of the last taboos of the church. It makes most of us anxious when someone talks about suicide...There’s so much silence around suicide in the church that it is quite literally killing us.” Rachael A. Keefe

“We already find it pretty easy to pray for people who have challenges to their physical health, and people usually offer these requests freely. Why are we not praying just as freely and openly about mental and spiritual health concerns? It is well past time for the Body of Christ to bear one another’s burdens truly and fully.” Rachael A. Keefe

“Stronger connections can increase a person’s sense of belonging or ‘mattering’ to a group, a sense of personal value or worth, and access to a larger source of support. Thus persons have greater motivation and ability to cope adaptively in the face of adversity.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Suicide Prevention Ministry: Developing a Plan of Action

Developing and implementing a suicide prevention ministry is surely more complex than checking off items on a list. It is, however, a good way to begin. What is our congregation already doing? What are our existing strengths and resources? What can we add to this list? Are there any obstacles in our way? Where should we begin?

- ___ 1. Pray daily for those touched by suicide in any way.
- ___ 2. Disseminate the Suicide Prevention Lifeline widely and frequently. Add it to cell phones, your church website, newsletter, Sunday bulletin.
- ___ 3. Know the major suicide warning signs.
- ___ 4. Consider what part stigma plays in your congregation's response to suicide.
- ___ 5. Dispel the myth that real Christians don't attempt suicide.
- ___ 6. Participate in Suicide Awareness Month in September.
- ___ 7. Address the theme of suicide where relevant in bible study.
- ___ 8. Join your local chapter of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness). Publicize and participate in their activities.
- ___ 9. Join your local chapter of AFSP (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention). Publicize and participate in their activities.
- ___ 10. Provide support to the family of the suicidal person.
- ___ 11. Maintain an updated list of therapists, psychiatrists, and relevant agencies in your local community. (Don't wait till a crisis occurs.)
- ___ 12. Avoid gossiping and sensationalizing a suicidal incident.
- ___ 13. Ensure that clergy have access to relevant training that supports their role in the pastoral care of suicidal persons and their families.
- ___ 14. Be mindful that God's love is unconditional. Listen without judgment. Be open to everyone who walks through the doors of the church.

Prayer for Healing

Leader: The God of Strength moves within us;

All: The God of courage hears our distress.

Leader: The God of hope reveals wholeness to us;

All: The God of healing touches us when we are broken.

Leader: When the pain overwhelms us, when the burden is too heavy,

All: We turn to our God who is sustaining and redeeming.

Leader: When there is loneliness, when there is isolation,

All: We turn to our God, who is loving and ever present.

Leader: For God created us, redeemed us and sustains us, and we are not alone.

All: Lead us in your ways, O God, and bring us your healing touch.

Leader: Almighty God, we pray that our brothers and sisters may be comforted in their suffering and made whole. When they feel afraid, give them courage; when they feel afflicted, afford them patience; when they are lost, offer them hope; when they are alone, move us to their side. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen. - *Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming, Liturgy of Healing and Holy Eucharist for the Prevention of Suicide*

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Web-Based Resources for Suicide Prevention Ministries

After an Attempt: A Guide for Taking Care of Yourself After Your Treatment in the Emergency Department <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/A-Guide-for-Taking-Care-of-Yourself-After-Your-Treatment-in-the-Emergency-Department/SMA18-4355ENG>

American Association of Suicidology <https://suicidology.org/> American Foundation for Suicide Prevention <https://afsp.org/>

Bringing Hope, Preventing Suicide (The Episcopal Church in Colorado)

<https://episcopalcolorado.org/bringing-hope-preventing-suicide/>

Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming, Suicide Prevention and Awareness

<https://www.diowy.org/Education-Ministry/suicide-prevention-and-awareness.html>

Liturgy of Healing and Holy Eucharist for the Prevention of Suicide

https://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/3253247/Suicide_Prevention_Liturgy.pdf

Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Prevention (Episcopal Church)

<https://episcopalchurch.org/faith-formation/mental-health>

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention <https://theactionalliance.org>

National Alliance on Mental Illness <https://nami.org/Home>

National Institute of Mental Health <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml>

National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide

https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Office-of-Mental-Health-and-Suicide-Prevention-National-Strategy-for-Preventing-Veterans-Suicide.pdf

Suicide Prevention Resource Center <https://www.sprc.org/>