“Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you oh Lord!” - Blessed Augustine
Why Mental Health? Why the Church?

The Church is a hospital, and not a courtroom, for souls. She does not condemn on behalf of sins, but grants remission of sins……
No one is truly free or joyful besides he who lives for Christ. Such a person overcomes all evil and does not FEAR ANYTHING!
-St. John Chrysostom

Mental Health Conditions and Contexts

► EVERYTHING IS SPIRITUAL
► Anxiety, Depression, Alcohol/Drug Use, Suicidality
► Anger issues/Personality Disorders and Traits, Social Media
► Peer Pressure, Family Problems (Marital and family dynamics)
► Communication Issues, Defense Mechanisms!!!
How does the Church view mental health?

- Scriptures: The Prophets, the Psalms, Proverbs, Sirach, Spiritual Anguish
- Fathers of the Church on depression, anxiety, worry (St. Ephraim, Evagrius, St. John Cassian)
- Desert Fathers- management of thoughts, worry, anxiety, acedia, despondency/despair (Origin of CBT), Canons of St. Timothy
- Mental Illness is NOT a Sin, it is a struggle that is fought, and the Church has always known and provided help for those struggling with this
- “The Hope of those who have no Hope, and the Help of those who have no helper”- Litany of the Sick, Liturgical Prayers, Agpeya Prayers

Scriptures:

- “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” - Matthew 6:34
- “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”- 1 Peter 5:7
- “Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down.” (Prv 12:25)
- “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”- Jeremiah 29:11
“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” - Luke 2:52

“Great is the mystery of Godliness God was manifested in the flesh” - 1 Timothy 3:16
Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Development and Healing

► **Biological:** Christ Grew in Stature
► **Psychological:** Christ Grew in Wisdom
► **Social:** Grew in favor of men
► **Spiritual:** Grew in favor of God
How to treat and help those with mental illness?

- The **Body**: Temple, The **Mind**: thoughts, the **Social**: community, and the **Spiritual**: Mysteries of the Church and God

- Church from the early times very empathetic

- We must learn to empathize with those who struggle

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**Biological**

- The Body and Care of it is revered and Pure in Orthodoxy
- Diet, Exercise, Good Sleep Hygiene
- Role of Psychiatric Medications
- “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” - 1 Corinthians 6:19
- For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. - 1 Timothy 4:8
- St. Paul teaches us that exercise of the Body has profit
- Sirach 38- Role of Physician and Medications
Psychological
- Coping Skills and Stress Management
- Keeping Busy: “Idleness is the Devil’s Playground!”
- Emergent vs Urgent vs Important,
  Psychotherapy: utilization of therapist, counseling, avenue of release (catharsis)
- Meditation: Jesus Prayer/Arrow Prayer
- “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” - 2 Corinthians 10:5

Social
- Always encourage good social connections
- EMPATHY- Use your Wounds; Never be apathetic, not too sympathetic, always empathetic”
- “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”- Matthew 18:20
- “Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” -Ecclesiastes 4:12
- “Evil company corrupts good habits”- 1 Corinthians 15:33, Church as a social gathering, Early Church Agape Meal; why church has social events
Spiritual

- **MYSTERIES OF THE CHURCH; The Eucharist, Repentance and Confession**
- **Prayer, Scripture reading and meditation**
- **PSALMS! The Psalms as Treatment for Bewildering Thoughts, Serenity of Soul, and helps with fears and a rest from the stress of the Day (St. Basil the Great)**
- **Thanksgiving** is the first step of Joy and peace. Even amidst distress to always be thankful.
- **Church starts every service with the prayer of Thanksgiving**

Our Lord and The Blind Man

- **Biological**: “After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.” - John Chapter 6
- **Psychological**: “His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” - John Chapter 6 Verse 8
- **Social**: No social support, people were judging him, no close social network, abandoned, Our Lord became to him a friend, and someone who cares!
- **Spiritual**: Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.
- **A man in distress, low self esteem and confidence, a man in worry and despair, anxious about his condition, begging for help**
Conclusions:

- Mental health conditions increasing
- Always provide a lending ear to those we serve, and address all four domains as our Lord did
- If function compromised and safety concern refer to physician for evaluation. Involvement of Parents as well.
- **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** Give examples of those in Scriptures who battled mental health conditions
- Share in the suffering of others: This is the True Manifestation of Agape Love
- Ultimate Goal in any type of wound or suffering is to share in the sufferings of Christ
- St. Paul said, “If we suffer with him we shall be Glorified with him”. Purpose of the Incarnation!

“Only the wounded healer can truly heal” - Irvin Yalom

Reminds us of Christ, and how we should look at our own wounds heal them, and then we can help and approach others in their strife and suffering.
Resources:

- Raising Lazarus: Healing in Orthodoxy
- Orthodox Psychotherapy
- Mental Illness and Spirituality; Theology of Illness (Jean Charlet)
- Overcoming Anxiety/Depression: Christ, the Church Fathers, and Cognitive Scientific Psychology by Fr. George Morelli
- Writings of the Desert Fathers; St. John Cassian and Evagrius, Ephrem the Syrian
- Our Thoughts Determine our Lives, Elder Thaddeus
- Many Self Help Books on Depression/Anxiety: DARE, David Burns Feeling Good, etc.