

# "When the soul is aching..!"

## Presentation for the UN International Mental Health Day

with Dr. Catriona Valenta



The Women's Federation and UPF hosted a presentation in Munich on Sunday, October 14 to mark the UN International Mental health Day (10.10.18).

Dr. Catriona Valenta's topic was "Wenn die Seele weint...!" (loosely, 'when the soul is aching') about mental health in a faith-based community (FFWPU), and attracted an audience of more than 25.

She began with an account of her own personal and professional background and experience and then posed several questions for the consideration of the audience:

- Are there mental health problems in our faith community?
- Where do they originate? Are the parents to blame?

-Are such problems simply 'spiritual problems'?

-Are they only to be found in those who have weak personalities or struggle with their faith?

To address these and other issues, she gave us a short review about the classification, etiology and treatment of mental illnesses, before introducing the project 'Healthy Minds', initiated and developed by members of Cranes Club Europe with appropriate professional backgrounds.

The overall goal of this project is to develop a culture in which all members of the European FFWPU who struggle with mental health issues can be dealt with compassionately and receive appropriate support.

The specific goals of Healthy Minds are:

- assess the need-nature and extent of mental illness in our community (anonymous questionnaire has already been distributed in Germany-to follow later in the UK)
- develop a 'principled perspective' of mental health-review of DP and words of Rev. Moon
- improve awareness and understanding amongst the membership-tackle shame, guilt, and blame.
- support for those affected and their family members



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The speaker discussed mental health in the context of DP. For consideration: the first Blessing 'be fruitful' is fulfilled by 'mind-body unity' but the three essential functions of 'mind'-intellect, emotion and will can be dysfunctional in mental illness; the second Blessing 'multiply' can be a challenge when one has severe problems with healthy relationships.

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Some consideration was given as to how an understanding of DP and the words of Rev. Moon can be integrated with how mental illness is understood in the light of advances in science and modern medicine. Dr. Valenta recommended a balanced approach to treatment in cooperation and liaison with available psychiatric services. She stressed that medication and various 'talk-therapies' play a decisive role in many mental illnesses, and at the same time, there is a much greater awareness in the medical community about the importance of spirituality and faith in mental health. Many conventionally trained psychiatrists and therapists will respect a faith-based point of view.

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A further question was then posed to the audience:

„is faith and membership of a faith-based community a help or hindrance in (mental) illness?

Positive factors are: belief gives meaning to life and hope /religious rituals can be soothing and stabilizing/ a community offers support and companionship/ a healthier lifestyle (smoking-drinking-drugs - casual sex are all discouraged).

But we must also be aware of factors with a negative influence: confidentiality is a huge issue, and gossip is very destructive /belief in God is good-but what kind of God? A punishing and judging God or loving parents? /belief in an almost unattainable ideal can be very discouraging.

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The song chosen to end the presentation- „The Streets of London"-reminded us of those who are far worse off than we are. Sadly, many homeless /rejected people are actually mentally ill.

The presentation provoked a lively question and answer session, and Magda Haugen was able to share some examples from her work and experience in a facility for the mentally ill. In this protected environment, many different therapeutic modalities are used and those with mental health issues are encouraged to maintain and use all their personal resources. Reference was made to helpful literature (a recommended book is: "Der emotionale Rucksack" - by Vivian Dittmar, - how to deal with unhealthy and burdensome emotions from the past).



And since this was October 14th-all were invited to celebrate a 36th wedding anniversary including a special cake prepared by Nenad Butic, who had already set the atmosphere at the very beginning with melancholy music on the Spanish guitar.

We then shared lunch over tables decorated in autumnal style and discussion, questions, sharing of experiences continued into the afternoon.

Thus for all those who were able to attend-despite the Munich marathon, road closures, election day and other obstacles-this was a good opportunity to deal with an important topic and as a community to come together, exchange ideas, experience value and fellowship and thus refresh the spirit.



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